

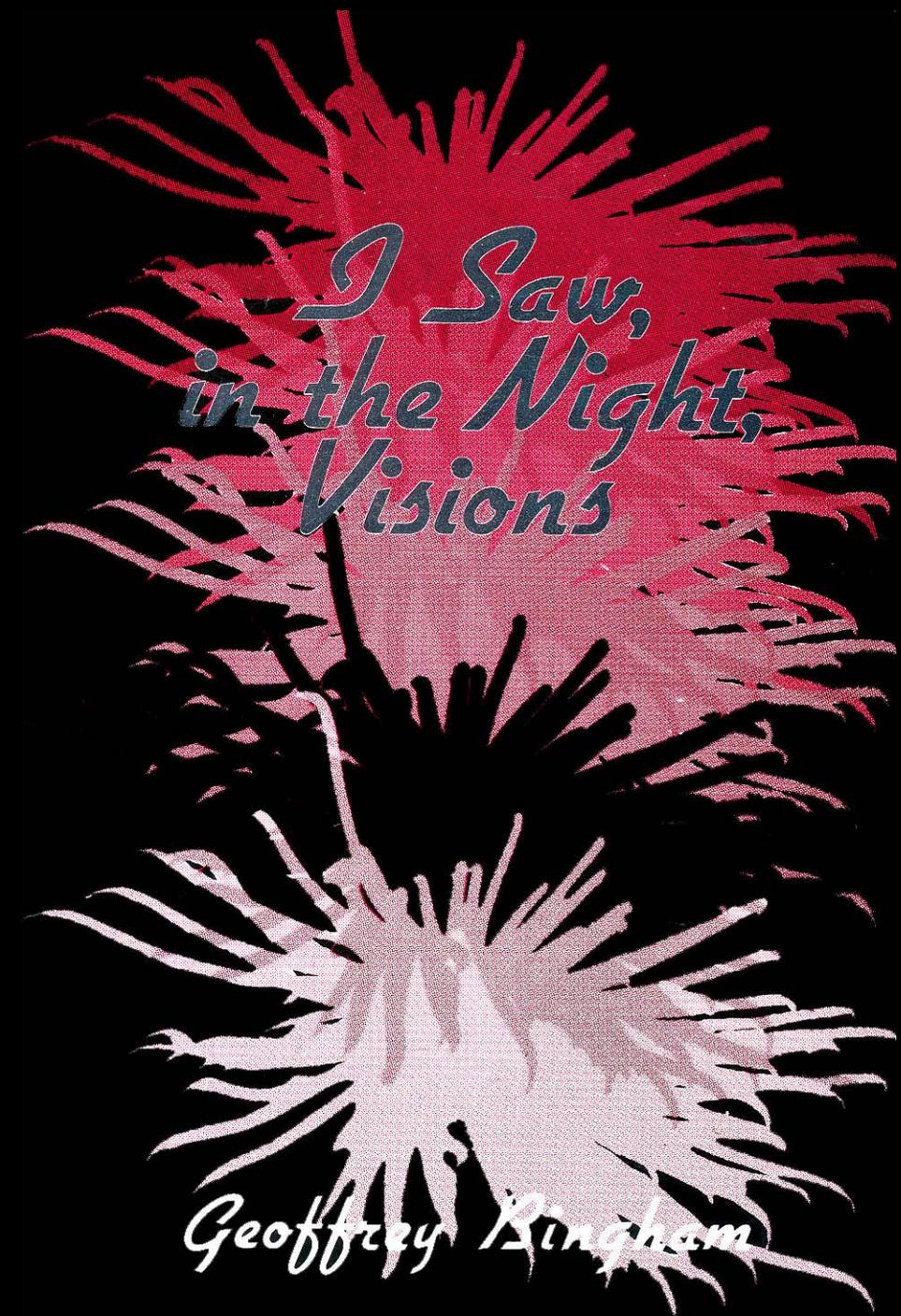
About this book....

This volume- *I saw in the night, visions-* is not in fact a book of visions. Some of us have had bad dreams and good visions, but they figure very little in our lives. We all require something more substantial, and under this title that is what we get. The author's previous books which resemble this present volume are *Angel Wings*, *The concentration camp*, and the *God and the Ghostown*. These books were made up of stories, essays and poems- an unusual but attractive mixture.

This new book is made of much stronger stuff than its predecessors. Geoffrey Bingham gets down to a new kind of exhortation. An accomplished short story writer, he is proving to be no less as an essayist and poet. Sometimes, it is difficult to distinguish between story and essay and poem, so much one are they in their attempt to confront the reader with the truth. In 'The Theological Student' a man is trying hard to know as much as God! In '**Primal Purity**' the blind is drawn up on man's amnesia concerning his pristine beginnings. '**Chainbreaker**' is action in a powerful way to liberate a group of slum kids. "the Criminals" is a grim story of law-retribution of the harshest kind, whilst '**I leap over Mountains**' is that of free and heady joy. The title " *I saw in the Night, Visions*" is one which leaves the reader shaking- as in fact do some others- but in good allegory. It might even be seen as good theology.

Some readers have said, "this is the best of Bingham!" ' better than before.' Some even see it as a new tractarian way of communication. Certainly it is truth revealed-and communicated- in a dynamic way.

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I SAW, IN THE NIGHT, VISIONS

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I saw in the night visions...

(DANIEL 7:13)

Contents



Preface	xi
YOUR HEART TO MINE	1
JUSTICE WITHOUT LOVE	3
THE SOIL	22
YOU MADE THE MAGPIES	29
TOTTERING OVER A HILL	31
FAIR WAVED THE CORN	41
CONDEMN ME NOT FOR STRAW	53
THE GOOD MAN	56
THE CRIMINALS	68
THE UNIQUE SUPPLY	82
UN-TRIVIAL PURSUITS	85
I SAW, IN THE NIGHT, VISIONS	101
TODAY I LEAP OVER MOUNTAINS	107
CHAIN-BREAKER	109
FRUCTIFYING FANTASY	133
INTO LIFE	138

THE THEOLOGICAL, STUDENT	144
MY OWN RIGHTEOUSNESS	164
OUT OF THE DEPTHS	18
BREAKTHROUGH IN LOVE	185
THE PRIMAL PURITY	192
TRUTH TRIUMPHANT	199
SOMETIMES...	202
THE HEALING HAPPENING	209
SERVANT SONG	216
SOLILOQUY	218
PRAYER AT GOLGOTHA	232
IDENTIFICATION	236

Preface



I Saw, in the Night, Visions is another production of the same kind as earlier titles, *Angel Wings*, *The Concentration Camp*, and *God and the Ghostown*. Each volume is a collection of stories, poems and essays which attempt to speak to contemporary society by way of the art forms of poems, stories and essays. It is rare to find the three of these forms in the one volume.

I have said in previous writings that theology does not always have to come through to us in formal and propositional ways. Those training in theology must, of course, use the inductive-deductive methods, and formal theology is a useful guard against irrational or novel thinking. Those who use allegories to communicate what they know—persons such as C. S. Lewis, George Macdonald, Tolkien and Charles Williams—were writers who had first come to terms with theology. They wrote from that background: a theological understanding.

Methods of communicating what one knows may differ from person to person, but our primary task is not to communicate theology as such, but the truth as it is. The truth is really God, and it comes to us primarily through His word and His acts. Christ came to bear witness to the truth, and

the Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth. Jesus said to his Father, 'Your word is truth.' God, of course, is one with His word. Jesus said of his own utterances, 'The words that I speak to you are spirit and life.' The truth is spirit and life.

A teacher communicates truth as he sees it. Too much has been said about the weakness of subjectivity, but not enough has been said concerning the objective reality of God within us—Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Whilst we may subjectively imagine God, or think we feel Him emotionally, we cannot be sure of our grounds. If, however, God objectively enters us, inhabits us, and gives us revelations of His Being, then we must not call that 'mere subjectivity'. Paul said, 'It pleased God to reveal His Son *in* me.' Paul was not claiming that subjectively he had sought the Son and discovered him, but rather that Christ had sought him, and discovered himself to Paul.

Each of us has an internal or interior experience of God. This is knowing Him, and it is (part' of) life eternal. All that is interior will find correspondence in the objective word of God, the canonical Scriptures. This does not make our experience of God's objective dwelling within us to be canonical. We cannot claim new areas of truth have been revealed, or that prophetically we can go beyond the canon of Scripture. What, however, we do know is that our experience of God springs from His initiative, and so our apprehension of the truth is *as* canonical, ie. is in conformity with the Scriptural canon.

I write this way because hard-headed theologians will have nothing but their strict categories of defining truth. John, however, speaks of 'an anointing from the Holy One'. He says this anointing abides in us, ie. is interior— though not subjective, as such—and that it teaches us all things so that when the heretics come we can sense their untruth, and reject their proclamation. I believe it is that 'anointing' which recognises truth whether it be in forms

strictly propositional, or spoken in poetic ways. The poet must be a man of truth before he is a poet. The essayist must be a man of truth before he assays to write. The story-teller must tell the truth through his medium. So, likewise, the theologian must be man of truth before he is a theologian, and he must not despise the media others use to communicate the truth they know.

If this preface is taken to be self-justification on my part for the modes of communication that I use, please let me say it is not. I think it is a pity that the rationalism of our days precludes men and women of truth from warmly, and livingly, bringing their wares of truth to our needy world. Not all that is not rationalistic is necessarily irrational. Pascal informed us that there is a logic of the heart that formal logic does *not* know. The logic of the heart must first be that of God's heart and then of ours. This, then, being the case, I doubt not but that any medium or mode will be useful in sharing the truth. 'God,' as someone humorously observed, 'still uses the jawbone of an ass to slay His Philistines.'

So, go out, little book, and be useful where you can. Out there they still love yarns, and poems, and even essays!

Geoffrey Bingham
Coromandel East, May 1986

Your heart to mine

I had passed you by, but you smiled.
'The warmth of it penetrated my heart
As a joyous golden sliver. I was moved.
Why should strange eyes show instant love
To a total stranger, or perhaps a partial one?

I was baffled in rich bewilderment.
love seems so private, so selective,
So wily then should I be loved?
What deserving was there in me for this?
I knew that none is deserving of love,
But love then is for serving and not deserving.
In that way all deserve.

I saw then, in that sudden flash,
That deep calls to deep. In quick recognition
A heart can see to heart, see in it
The mutuality of rare understanding and respond,
So that the sudden recognition brings union
And union the unspeakable delight
Of mutual acceptance.

Then you passed on. As others see and greet,
So did your Spirit too, in soft salute;

I saw you pass before the words arose,
 And with them the gentle tears of gratitude.
 'Great grace!'—I heard the gentle whisper
 (Whisper of God: whisper of love)-
 Grace where the heart desires, yes, craves
 Until it meets the other heart
 And knows the quick embrace.

I had passed you by but you smiled.
 Your smile arrested me as though it knew
 What I too knew (and know), that God is love,
 That all the world's for love since love created it.
 Only the cruelty we see does draw us back
 From faith in fulness, yet 'tis the lie
 That hinders us. And lie it is.
 His eyes that glow from cruel cross
 Give lie to lie. The truth is love.

Love is so private, is so intimate
 'Twixt man and woman, man and wife,
 But love is not confined to this.
 Its boundaries are as broad as God,
 As deep and high, as strong and full
 For all the family of mail. You smiled
 And passed anon. I knew two hearts had met,
 None taking from the other. Gift for gift
 We smiled, without the loss of virtue true.
 Deep cries to deep and like to like,
 True recognition in the Father's heart.

When in His heart our hearts are met,
 Then what's the wrong? No wrong at all!
 The world goes public in the Father's love
 And thus is love most intimate.

Justice without love



He crouched in the high harsh grass, with the coarse fern brushing his face. What was in front of him was little more than a hut, a faint pretence of being a house. His rifle was at the alert, safety-catch released, and he ready for action. Time and again they had taught him in the terrorist camp how to take swift running movements, crouched and rapid, and with it the sudden turning, the flashing look to right and left, upwards and downwards. He burst suddenly into this activity. He was outside the door. With a sideways thrust of his booted foot he burst it open. In a flash he was inside the building, his rifle trained on the figure seated at the table, his own body hidden from outside view. Then, with a quick movement, he closed the door.

The man at the table seemed to have only a faint curiosity. He was writing, working away at notes. He had books spread in front of him. He said quietly, 'You from the People?' That is what they called the terrorists—the People'. They called their army 'the People's Army'.

The answer was a curt nod. The figure was still taut, but gradually realising that the man posed no threat. Then he asked the question, still curt, but a bit contemptuous: 'You the missionary?'

The other man nodded in reply. 'That's right,' he said, 'I'm the missionary.' He allowed himself a gentle smile. 'I guess that's your category also, eh?' he asked.

The terrorist shook his head violently. His voice was angry. 'Religion means nothing to me. It is...' He didn't finish his sentence.

'... the opiate of the people, eh?' concluded the other for him.

The anger was still on the intruder's face. 'That's right,' he said. 'So you know your Marx, eh?'

The missionary shook his head. 'Not my Marx. Yours. His teaching was the real opiate of the people.'

The terrorist came closer, and peered at the man. 'You could never give the freedom he was about,' he said.

The missionary nodded agreement. Then he said steadily, 'Nor could Marx or Engels, or anyone else, for that matter. Freedom doesn't come that way.'

'Freedom will come,' the other man said, still in anger. 'will come with the destruction of tyranny.'

The answering smile was not derisive, only slow and sad. The missionary kept staring at the table. After a time the soldier saw there was a Bible amidst the other books.

'Don't tell me,' he said, 'that you still use that tripe.' Again there was no answer; only a continuing silence. Then the deep blue eyes of the man looked up at him—at the terrorist—and the terrorist fell into silence.

Finally the missionary spoke. 'I never thought I would meet you here, Kevin.'

He had shocked the soldier, who burst into sharp, savage invective. 'Don't call me Kevin,' he said. 'And how the hell did you come to know my name?' He was staring angrily at the man before him. Then he said curiously, 'How could you know my name? No one calls me that. No one here even knows it.'

'Kevin Litchfield,' the bible-man said slowly. 'Kevin

Litchfield of Penshurst, Sydney. Remember?'

The cold blue eyes stared from below the cragged brows, above the matted and filthy beard. The lips twitched under the swathe of facial hair. Then the head—that great coarse head—thrust forward, the lips twisted in a snarl. 'How would you know that? How the hell would you ever know that?'

The man stood and moved towards him. Soon they were standing and looking eyeball to eyeball.

'We went to Sunday School together,' said the man of faith.

A great roar went up from the terrorist. 'Sunday School!' he exploded. 'We went to Sunday School!' His hands gripped the rifle in fury. He edged it up under the chin of the missionary. 'I could kill you!' he shouted angrily.

The missionary shook his head. 'No point at all,' he said gently. 'Just a fact of life, and you know it.'

It was then the terrorist recognised the man before him. He almost whispered his recognition. 'Holy mackerel! Danny Ratcliffe. Ratcliffe the Pounder!' His blue eyes danced. 'You great ratbag!' he shouted. 'What are you doing here as a missionary?' He seemed astounded.

'For that matter,' Danny said, 'what are you doing here as one of the People?'

Neither spoke for a moment. Danny's eyes were darting over the army-camouflage of the other man's clothing. He was taking in every detail. Now that he knew who it was, he was deeply interested. He had seen terrorists before. He had even been in their camps, and they had kicked him out contemptuously. No one cared about the missionary as a hostage. His own opinion of the People was not high, but then also it was not low. He felt for them, even when he rejected their cruelty.

The terrorist spoke first, and now his voice was icy. 'I came here to give freedom to people under tyranny, to set

them free from slavery.’

Danny nodded. He had heard this many times, and the hearing did not dull the impact. What Kevin said was true; the people were in bondage. They ought to be freed. He was not a mild man himself. Many times he had raged and fumed at the lot of those to whom he ministered. He also knew the new tyranny that was rising up out of its own anger and burning resentment.

‘How come, then?’ he asked.

Kevin had seated himself on a chair. He had been trained to be wary, so that his rifle was leaning on one knee. With one hand he was searching for his tobacco and papers. He began rolling a cigarette, deftly, with one hand. When he finished he lit it, and seemed grateful for the smoke, inhaling deeply. Finally he looked at Danny.

‘It was Vietnam that did it,’ he said grimly. He stared into the distance, into some memory or other, and was silent. After a time he spoke again. ‘It changed me from a person of the suburbs,’ he said. ‘it took me out of our crammed up box-homes and put me out where human beings are.’ He drew again on his cigarette. ‘It made me understand what bastards human beings can be.’

Danny nodded. This was no news to him. He too had no illusions about human nature. To himself he always called it ‘fallen human nature’. He knew it could be cruel, rapacious, malignant. Kevin was staring at him—eye level—and his face held a sneer.

‘I don’t see men as you do, all romantic,’ he said. Danny nodded again. ‘Don’t quite see them that way myself,’ he said. ‘That was the way we learned it at high school. There were humanists, even in those days.’

Kevin’s eyes puckered. ‘All part of that system,’ he said, and his eyes narrowed. ‘But you still believe the fairy tales,’ he said, gesturing towards the Bible.

Danny didn’t seem to want to enter into that kind of

argument. ‘I get by,’ he said. ‘I just get by with truth.’

The terrorist was impatient. ‘The truth hasn’t done us much good,’ he said. ‘The church has been the backbone and basis of capitalism for centuries. Religion has kept the masses in chains.’

Danny didn’t feel like sharing that stale polemic. He grinned faintly and said, ‘Tell me the rest. I mean, what happened after Vietnam, and how did you get here?’

‘None of your business,’ the other man said roughly. He rose, gripping his rifle. He began to move around the room. Then he swivelled. ‘They’re out there,’ he said savagely. ‘They’re after me.’ He gave a queer grin. ‘Now that’s really funny,’ he said, ‘because I happen to be after them, too.’

When Danny said nothing he paced around the room, his gaze darting at every detail. Then he said in a quiet voice, ‘I suppose you belong to *them*. I suppose that’s how you got my name.’ He was muttering to himself. After a time he came back to Danny. ‘You are on their side, hey?’ he demanded.

Danny stayed calm. ‘Not for, not against,’ he said. ‘My job is to bring faith to the people; even, if possible, to your People.’

For a moment Kevin glared and then he sat again. He was tired now, and his body sagged. ‘You have anything to drink?’ he asked.

‘Tea,’ said Danny, ‘or coffee. Just as you like.’

‘Strong coffee,’ the other said, his eyes gleaming, ‘black and thick as you like, with plenty of sugar.’

After a time the burner was hissing away, and it kept the silence for itself. The steam rose, and then the sweet and acrid smell of coffee filled the room.

The terrorist asked, ‘You do everything here—the whole box and dice?’

‘That’s right,’ Danny said, ‘I do everything here.’

By this time they both had coffee in mugs, and the soldier

was helping himself to sugar. He seemed grudgingly mellowed—just a trifle. He sipped the scalding fluid and asked, ‘You married, Danny? You got children?’

Danny nodded. ‘They’re up in the hills—at the school. I come up on my own until the vacation. Then I collect them and bring them back here.’

The other man shook his head. ‘Too dangerous,’ he said, ‘too damned dangerous here.’ He stared at Danny. ‘The action will be on soon,’ he said. ‘Then everything will blow sky-high.’

Danny seemed not to hear the last bit. He said, ‘I married someone you know. You remember the girl Leach? You remember Jenny?’ He noticed the other man’s eyes gleamed. Yes, he remembered Jenny. Sure, he remembered Jenny.

‘How come then,’ he asked, ‘that they don’t take you hostage?’

Danny grinned. ‘There’s no Australian Embassy, and the Brits seem slack about hostages.’ His grin widened. ‘Maybe that’s their way of handling the matter. I don’t know. Once I was a hostage but they let me go.’

They both sat silent. Danny had turned off the kerosene burner, and the room was still. They could hear the bush noises, and the cries they knew so well. So far there was no danger. They both had a smell for danger, and when it came they would know. Even so, Kevin was cagey, nervous, irritable. But he was also curious about Danny.

After a time he said, ‘Never knew you got religion. How did that happen?’

‘In the army,’ Danny said, ‘and in the Islands. Just before the war ended. It wasn’t religion. It was faith. I think I worked it through that a man has to have faith. It was just what I would put my faith in that was to matter.’ He grinned disarmingly. ‘I guess God’s the best object for faith.’

The other man seemed too tired to ridicule him. He was muttering away to himself. Danny felt a bit alarmed. ‘What did you say?’ he asked.

The terrorist seemed not to hear him. Then he blazed out, ‘If it wasn’t for your religion and all that crap we would not be in the mess we are today. How come your great God hasn’t tidied up His universe, eh? How come with all His power He can’t control what happens?’ He spat disgustedly. ‘Maybe He just doesn’t care,’ he said. He added gloomily, ‘That is *if* He exists.’

Danny was relieved at the outburst. He could cope with this. Anyway he had heard it all before—a thousand times. Long ago he had learned that these outbursts against the Deity were not the real problem. Somewhere—somehow—human beings have been scandalised. That is why they are angry. He knew injustice lay at the root of bitterness, and bitterness at the root Of injustice. He went back to sitting silently, his eyes wandering absently across the text in front of him. He had trained his mind to proceed with one line of thought whilst he dealt with another.

‘Your trouble,’ the terrorist was saying, ‘is that you have a suburban mind in a South American jungle. You’re as narrow as Penshurst, as crammed up as those little box-homes.’

Danny knew what he meant. The long rows of homes, some respectable and solemn, others unimaginative and dreary. Human beings living in them, working in the city, commuting to schools and offices and factories. It all seemed so pointless, so aimless. He could easily understand Kevin feeling hemmed in. He had felt that way himself. That was why he had liked the Islands, although the carnage had troubled him. Yet even in the carnage there seemed a wider spirit, something almost magnificent. The dimensions were different, even exciting. Eventually, however, his gut had rebelled. He had wearied of the slaughter, slaughter on

both sides. It all seemed so futile, so senseless. The rhetoric of the politicians had sickened him. Times of panic, when men had fled for their lives, had revolted him. After a time he found himself cynical. Everything seemed a dreary grey. Strangely enough it was returning to Sydney and to Penshurst which had altered his perspective, especially when he had met Jenny after years of absence. Something very simple had come to him in her faith, a fact which at first he resented and then accepted.

Kevin was sneering. 'You really can't believe now, can you,' he said, 'that you ever fell for that stuff—Sunday School, church and all that?'

'Seems a long way from here,' Danny admitted. 'Seems unreal.' He nodded. 'In a way it was,' he said. 'It seemed so far from the real thing.'

Kevin wasn't listening. His mind was a long way away. He felt sick, trembling with anger, revolted at the memory. What a hoax! He gripped the rifle, and started towards the missionary. 'I ought to shoot your guts out,' he said. 'I ought to kill you. You spread your tripe around, you and all your tribe, but you do nothing to change the lot of the people!'

Danny refrained from smiling. Two months before, he had been in the capital. He had watched television. He had analysed the plots on the soap operas, the westerns, the cops and robbers. Inwardly he grinned. They were all out for justice—that was the basic theme—getting justice. Then he stopped grinning. For one thing the soldier was staring at him with venom, and for another there were sounds coming through the bush.

Kevin rushed to the barred window, peering outside. There was still sun enough to see by, and he could make out the peaked caps of his men, with the red linen sewn around the bands.

'They're ours,' he said, and then added, 'mine.' He looked

at Danny. 'They might want to kill you,' he said.

It had happened before. It had happened many times. Even so Danny felt the tinge of excitement, the faint sickness that threatened his stomach. He looked steadily at the terrorist. 'What's it all about this time?' he asked.

Kevin looked grim. 'It's the village,' he said, 'they're going to punish the traitors. They've been informing the Government.'

Danny stiffened. 'Traitors? There aren't any traitors. I know that. They're my people. No one says anything to anyone. Not either way. They're tight-lipped both ways. They live in fear of you both.'

'That's it,' said the terrorist, 'they won't fight with us. They want their freedom but they'll give nothing to get it.'

The missionary stared at him, aghast. 'My God!' he breathed. 'You're mad. If they side with you the Government comes and destroys them. If they side with the Government you kill them. So what can they do? They were better off before the People's Army came.'

Kevin was still staring through the window. 'They will see you as a traitor too,' he said. 'Anyone who doesn't side with us.'

Danny's mind was in a turmoil. There was a throb in his head, and a sickening pain in his gut. He suddenly had a clear picture of Kevin. In fact it was a kind of kaleidoscope. One picture was of Kevin sitting in Sunday School, chubby and mild, staring up at the teacher, gripped by the story, and naive. Another was of them—the whole gang, Kevin included—rushing out of the fruit orchard, being pursued by an irate householder. Then it was cricket, and Kevin throwing down his bat in rage because he had been dismissed on the first ball. Kevin was always high on justice, always wanting it to go his way. There was another of him standing on the outside of the church teenage group, sulking, but wanting to be accepted, especially by the girls. There was nothing

dramatic, nothing unusual in any of the scenes. They were typical of any Penshurst boy; nothing of brilliance in any of them. They were just ordinarily human.

Danny felt his head hurting when the door burst open. The short stocky men. poured in, almost filling the room. They went past him into the other room, and through into the bathroom. They ferreted with the fixed bayonets of their rifles. They scarcely seemed to see Danny. It had happened so many times, not only with the People's Army, but also with the Government troops. The pain eased in his head. Now he was not unduly worried. Kevin was talking to the stubby little officer who wore distinguishing red stripes. After a time the men left, but they stayed outside the house, squatting and chattering away. Only the Australian terrorist remained inside. He stared across at Danny.

'They want to kill you,' he said. 'They are tired of you being around. They say you give too much spirit to the village people.'

Danny had heard something of/his before. So he said nothing, staring back.

Kevin went on gloomily, 'They say you have some kind of power. You keep the people neutral. They have no loyalty either way, neither to them, nor us.' He was struck by a sudden thought. 'Maybe you have your own thing going, eh? Maybe you are building up your own kingdom.'

The missionary looked tired, but he spoke. 'It's hard for your kind to believe that people like us are not after something. You think everybody is after something for himself.' He stared directly at the terrorist. 'It never seems to enter your minds that we're not after anything—not anyway for ourselves. We just want to serve.'

Kevin was restless. He stood up and walked around. His right hand still held the rifle, but only loosely. He walked as he talked. 'Don't give me that Jesus stuff,' he said. 'Don't tell me about dying for others, and laying down your life

and that kind of thing. I never did buy it, not even as a boy, and anything I had was finished for me in Vietnam. All the other stinks. It never did anything for us as boys, and it does nothing for us as men.'

Danny felt the dreariness of it all. It was like some dull TV scenario, some ham-acted scene. It was unreal in its emptiness. But—at the same time—it was pathetically real. He listened to this man who had suddenly come from out of his childhood, chattering away, appearing tough, but still a puzzled, angry human.

'Those damned houses,' he was saying. 'I can see them in my dreams. Long unending rows of them, with families that never knew what it was to live. Stereotypes, and dull ones at that. There was nothing to them; nothing to any of them. That's one helluva way for a human being to grow up and try to live.' The bitterness was in his voice.

He looked down at Danny. 'And now they are going to snuff you out. Just like that! Nothing heroic, nothing dramatic. Just a bullet, and you're gone.'

Danny was thinking, 'It's unreal. It's all unreal. This is what they think is toughness. Violence gives them a flow of adrenalin. They are the angry people, loaded with guilt. They are mad for power, but really they are dull.'

'You kill for an ideal,' he said to Kevin, 'and your guilt drives you on to kill more. You justify yourself by your dreams of freedom for others, but you are bound yourselves. You wallow in guilt. You are bored. Violence is your diversion.'

He saw the terrorist grow angry, but he didn't care much. What would happen, would happen. He lived in that thought every day. Once it had brought its terror with it, but these days it didn't matter. He had a higher apocalyptic than this simplistic terrorist one. He lived in the greatness of God's sovereignty. He had a message that these guerrilla patriots didn't even begin to understand.

‘Guilt!’ the terrorist shouted at him. ‘Violence! You ought to talk. You killed in the Islands. You have blood on your hands. You’re in it as much as we are. You are part of the oppressor system. We are liberators.’

Danny was seeing the rows of houses, the children that gathered to play in the parks, that made their way to Bondi for the surf, or the cricket ground for the Tests in summer and the football in winter. He saw them in a flashing kaleidoscope of events, and he knew that life had been played out just as fully and just as dramatically there as here in the bush and the jungle. The players were no less real whether in a city or a suburb, or in the rural areas. It had nothing to do with environment. It had to do with being truly human or denying the realities of true humanity. He could not get it out of his mind that Kevin was unreal, and that it was by violence he was trying to achieve reality. He thought calmly, ‘Soon he will think that killing me will make it all the more real.’

When he spoke it seemed to the terrorist that his own gibes and accusations had been bypassed. He wanted the missionary’s answers. Somehow he needed them.

Danny was saying, ‘You know, Kevin, it wasn’t all empty back there. There’s nothing wrong with houses or suburbs, or even cities. Environment and circumstances do not make us or unmake us. Heredity and parental upbringing don’t necessarily make us dreary or turn us into stereotypes.’ He felt like shouting, but kept his voice even. ‘I didn’t see anyone too stereotyped in war. I have never met anyone who isn’t somehow different from others. Every man is unique in his own way. Every man is special if he will be. Every man can have greatness if he will.’

Kevin was staring at him, saying nothing, conveying nothing. Danny continued quietly. ‘There was a lot of greatness in those suburban homes,’ he said, ‘like women coping with husbands who didn’t know how to relate to them or the

children, men who could only find their masculinity in a pub or at the footy. There were husbands whose wives seemed silly and empty, and who—as grown men—wanted to fulfil childhood dreams and achieve human greatness. There were children who dreamed romantically but saw their dreams going down the drain, as life seemed to close around them. There were broken homes and shattered relationships. There was pain and suffering.’

Danny paused, thinking about his own home. ‘But there was greatness in it all, if you looked for it, and if you wanted it. The homes that were filled with love and fun, and in which there was encouragement. Nothing spectacular, but the human drama being played out with purpose. You can sneer at the churches on the street corners, but they gave faith and they gave hope, and they encouraged people in serenity. They gave life in their own simple sort of way.’

‘Religious parasites!’ the terrorist shouted. ‘They kept people ignorant. They never let them see their lot.’

‘In action in war-time,’ Danny said, as though he was ignoring his childhood friend, ‘we saw greatness. Men laying down their lives. Men fighting dreadful odds. Men realising how futile wars were, and how worthwhile the life of peace at home could prove.’

Kevin said, ‘You’re crazy. What about today? What about the emptiness and the futility? What about their affluence—their homes, their cars, their possessions, their pets and their bombs! What about those, hey? What about the threat of nuclear war? What about the rapes and the murders and the cruelty and the evil?’

Outside the chattering was increasing. Some kind of an argument was going on. Danny knew the language, but he couldn’t catch the words. However, he knew the tone, and he sensed he was the subject of their argument. He heard someone shouting. Perhaps it was the officer with the red stripes. He found himself grinning. ‘I think they’re after my

blood,' he said.

The terrorist was staring at him. 'It doesn't worry you?' he asked.

Danny nodded. 'Oh yes, a bit,' he said. 'I just think it is a bit ironical that I may die when it's so pointless. I wouldn't mind an heroic death, but this will be so stupid. I do nothing to worry the People's Army. The villagers want me to live, for somehow I give them hope. Somehow I have brought them to a new dimension—one they didn't know before. Nothing of this is understood by the People's Army and so my death accomplishes nothing. I am a kind of pointless sacrifice.'

The door opened and the officer came in. He shouted at Danny. 'You are an enemy of the people!' Danny felt he was shouting to convince himself. He just looked at the officer. The man with the stripes turned to the Australian terrorist. 'Wipe him out!' he shouted. 'He is a parasite. He keeps the people neutral. They won't come with us.'

Kevin's jaw dropped a little. 'You want me to kill him, eh?' he asked. Danny thought he looked a bit bewildered. 'We need a trial first,' he insisted, 'and then we can do what we have to do.'

'We've had a trial before,' the officer snarled, 'and even the People's Army acquitted him. The Government don't kill him, so he must be guilty. That's enough for us.'

The terrorist was undecided. 'If the court thought him guiltless, why kill him?'

Now the officer was angry with the Australian terrorist. 'So you want to protect him, eh?' he raged. 'You want to save him because he is your countryman, because he is white. You put him before the revolution.' In his anger he swung his rifle in Kevin's direction.

Danny jumped up. He was as quick and free in the language as the officer. 'Let him be,' he said. 'He has been brought up to appreciate justice. All you can understand is

the revolution. It isn't the same with him. He thinks the revolution will bring justice, but you and I know it won't. It will bring food and clothing. It will make the oppressed into the new oppressors, but some will go on starving—the ones who don't starve now. That's what it will do.'

The officer had swung his rifle until it pointed at Danny, but the anger was not alive, or if it was the violence had receded. He was listening. Before he had only heard about the missionary. Now he was understanding the magic of the man. Also—miraculously enough—a thin edge of new thought and logic was penetrating him.

Danny was still talking. 'You want to change things here, just where we are,' he was saying, 'but with every killing, every slaughter, and with all the violence you are killing the thing you are about. You'll never breed love for men, and peace for your people. You turn them into perpetual killers.'

The terrorist wondered why the officer didn't shoot the missionary down—then and there. He marvelled at Danny's facility in the language and dimly he knew that Danny also had the Indian mind. He could understand their thought patterns, patterns which had evaded the terrorist in all the years he had been with them. They simply joked with him, glad of his help, but cutting him off from their own intimacy.

The officer said slowly, but with respect, 'Now I see why you are a dangerous man. You have a golden tongue. You can convince the people here that war is no good. You can talk to them about peace.' He stared hard at Danny. 'Where did you learn about this peace of yours? Your own Western nations have never known that peace. They war amongst themselves, and they send missionaries to keep us from fighting.'

Kevin knew that wasn't the truth. Sunday School and church were so far removed from parliament and government. There was a curious dichotomy between the two.

Missionaries had little or no link with politics. He wanted tell the officer that, but knew it would be useless.

Danny gestured towards the table and his Bible, and included the other books and papers. He sensed he had little time left. This man wasn't wanting to hear some theory of peace, and he had been taught about religion being dangerous, the opiate of the people.

'I guess I can't convince you,' he said. 'All I know is that the people of the village are reasonably happy. They grow their food, they work, they hunt in the jungle. They help one another. They love their worship; like coming together. Sometimes they have feasts, cultural festivals. They remember the past, and they like the present. They have learned the dignity of man. They don't hate you. They know their government is far from perfect, but they don't hate the men who rule. They have learned to accept all men, coloured white.'

The officer spoke coldly. 'That is very dangerous trine. That is why you missionaries must be extinguished.' He jerked his rifle higher. Danny knew with certainty that that moment he was not going to die. He might, die later, not now. His words were eating into the brain of the man who stared at him. He also knew they were dangerous words. They spoke of a new way, and, maybe, a better way.

Danny was thinking about the remorseless nature of ^{guilt} and the violence it bred. He was thinking about the ceaseless hatred in Northern Ireland, the unremitting hatred between Arab and Jew, between Moslem and infidel, between oppressors in guilt, and the people they oppressed. He was thinking about this officer caught up in the maelstrom of history, in the bitterness of human alienation, and then about the remedies man proposed and none of them effective. He also knew of the earnest, abortive endeavours of the pacifists, and the dangerous plans of the self-made messiahs. He was grateful for his own calming knowledge of

God's sovereignty in the pitiful evil of divided and ambitious humanity.

So he waited. Just waited.

Time and movement were suspended and the three men were frozen in their drama. The anger had gone from the little officer. The tall Australian terrorist gripped his rifle as though welded to it, but somehow he was disarmed. The old rage had drained away from him. Something of an alarming nature was happening within Kevin. The image of suburban streets. Vietnamese jungle, Indian villages, and concrete jungles was dissolving. All he could see was men and women, and the crowding children. Matters of race and class suddenly seemed unimportant and concocted. Humanity as humanity was what mattered, and yet in his puzzled mind he could not grasp the solution to the human dilemma. His brain felt tired. It seemed to take an eternity for thoughts to crawl across his mind.

Then the spell was broken. The figures slowly came to life, as out of a still picture. The officer glared at Danny, lowered his rifle and marched out with dignity. Kevin arched back, leaning sideways on his rifle and looking thoughtfully at Danny. After a time, he sat down, the rifle between his knees.

Somewhere a fly buzzed and its song was loud.

Danny could hear the sounds outside, and they were different. The men were murmuring, not arguing. 'I wonder what they'll do,' said Danny.

Kevin stared at him. 'You don't seem to care much, do you?' he asked.

Danny didn't answer him, but kept looking down at the floor. The fly was buzzing away in one corner, perhaps caught in a web. Then the missionary spoke.

'I do care,' he said. 'I like living. I like bringing the message of love and peace and forgiveness. I don't want to be snuffed out uselessly when I can go on telling that. I hate

human injustice as deeply as you, but I don't think violence can kill violence. Justice may seem to gain control through revolutions, but the gain is usually temporary. Change has to come in the heart. Too many revolutionaries are simply expressing their own 'personal needs—emotional needs— finding a place in the sun by violence, working out angers which are not merely to do with world justice. They have their roots in other things, such as family maladjustments, deprivation and the like.'

He looked at Kevin. 'You may think ms' idea is useless, and that it constitutes a doctrine of *laissez faire*, but it isn't that, really. It is knowing the truth of God's rulership, of His complete sovereignty. We use sovereignty in one way, and He uses it in another way—the planned and patient way.' The missionary broke off and looked at the terrorist. 'Terror won't heal the hurts of men. Somehow they have come back to their full dignity, and the only way God could bring them back is by a Cross.'

The silence settled temporarily amongst them. Outside murmuring had grown fainter. Both men knew the soldiers were drifting away, maybe towards the village. Both wondered what would happen in the village.

Then the terrorist spoke. 'You really believe that the Cross-thing will change the world?.' he asked. He made a gesture of impatience. 'But that's crazy.'

'Crazy it is,' Danny said, 'but what solution can anyone propose apart from it?'

Both knew that plenty of solutions had been proposed, and that none of them had succeeded—not in the light of human evil. The evil was always there to cause those solutions to crumble, or to so impose them that they became greater evils in themselves. Even Kevin knew that. Long ago the worms of doubt had begun to gnaw him.

Danny said slowly, 'Our mistake has been that man matters most, but this is not so. God matters most, and when we

see that, and live by that, then man really begins to matter. Only then does he begin to discover—and recover—his true dignity.'

The darkness gathered around the simple house, as the two men sat and pondered. The People's Army drew nearer to the village. Both the men—each in his own way—wondered again what would happen. Although it was time for eating, neither felt like having food. The intolerable burden of the human dilemma was upon them both. One man was wondering how you could contain the evil, selfishness and injustice of the human race, and the other man was seeing it being borne, by a man, on a cross.

Their long thoughts were being drawn out, and the darkness itself began to lengthen, surrounding them and then surmounting them, but they sat without movement as the darkness increased.

The soil



He, stooped, then knelt on one knee. His hand shovelled the soft earth, lifting it so that it lay on his hand as a small, dark pile. His other hand felt it, gently. It was moist, light and friable. When he pressed it, it did not resist but also it did not compact. It was soft to his touch, and had no acid to eat at his palms.

He sensed the miracle of it. Ten years ago it had been light to look at, slightly sandy, but ready to compact into some thing hard and resistant. It had been harsh, acidic and raw.

He remembered his first efforts at taming it. The earthmoving man had come with his back-hoe, and had pushed down the old stringy-barks, up-ending them so that their roots stared at the sky, and the great red and grey holes were bared to sun and sight. The trees had been pushed aside, into a great heap, and they had been burned. Now, in memory, he could smell their tangy smoke, and see their glow against the autumn evening.

With some excitement he had begun to dig. It was all stiff and hard, this soil. It seemed to have no life. Its surface covered great shafts of rock—strong, resistant ironstone that had embedded itself over millennia. He had wrestled with it, using pick and crowbar and shovel. After some days

there was a cleared patch, and he had dug it into some kind of raw submission. He had mixed some animal manure into it, and even a little compost, but it seemed opposed to the treatment, as though centuries of raising eucalypts and wild, tough undergrowth was all it had learned, and all it had wanted to do.

The vegetables he planted seemed alien to that soil. So, too, did the seeds, for they scarcely germinated. The vegetable seedlings straggled their way upwards. The green of the cabbages turned to purple toughness, and he pulled them up. The carrot seeds sprouted into anaemic foliage. Only the bitter milk thistles seemed to flourish, and other weeds which had bided their time, lying secretly in the soil, against a day such as this.

The one triumphant plant was the potato. Its tubers seemed to flourish in the sterile soil. Green tips showed through the surface, and compounded themselves. They seemed untouched by the multitudinous small stones that were still in the patch. Later their little eyes winked at the gardener, and urged him to go on to other things. He was a tough character, anyway, and he was determined to make something of it.

Others had given him temporary help. One day a huge truck arrived unexpectedly- It disgorged tons of meat-works' animal manure, a mixture of cattle and sheep droppings. He overlaid the soil with it, and began patiently digging it in.

In the winter the soil went soggy. His wellington boots sank into it, in depth, even deeper than he had dug. Winter grass grew with the same anaemic yellow he had seen in the carrots. Carrots, for their part, were short and stubby, growing deformed heels, tasting bitter. Even the valiant rhubarb looked compressed and restricted.

When the summer came the soil dried to hardness. It ate

the thin layer of grass-cuttings that tried to make a mulch. The sprinklers would look brave enough, flashing in the sunlight, but their water barely penetrated the compacted surface.

This was the soil on which he could easily have given up, but then he loved it! That was the secret: he was proud of soil that at last had become his own. He knew something of the mystery of soils. Years ago, in high school, he had been lectured about soils. He could see his teacher, tall and dry as dust himself, telling about the mystery of soil, of chemicals, acids, alkalis, of soil physics which enabled a person to know his soil and learn to treat it with respect and affection, and finally to win it into rich fertility.

He had not forgotten the lesson. It was that memory which kept him picking away, pulling out stones, adding fertiliser, trying to cultivate. Once he had been young, and the digging, raking, hoeing and planting had been easy. It was less easy now, but then no less enjoyable.

He watched the mounds of manure grow. He examined his compost heaps daily. He saw vegetables beginning to like the soil in which they had been planted. In summer mulch protected the surface from becoming a hard skin. and in winter the plants seemed to have a healthy green. Cabbages hearted, caulies creamed themselves under the protective leaves, and the turnips seemed to be saying that it was their kind of soil.

When there was money enough he had bought a rotary hoe—something small, but with a motor—and it tilled the soil. Time and again he turned it over, piling on the manure, adding trace elements, and fertilising ahead of planting. He watched the metamorphosis with incredible joy.

Now he was seeing his rewards pile up. The soil was darkening, and at the same time softening. He had almost come to hate the sight of boulders and stones as the hoe hefted them to the surface, but now he was glad when he sighted

them. Each removal meant better soil. Once he had despaired of ever clearing them, but often he would work for an hour with the hoe and not see a stone.

The time had come when the soil had been changed, transformed in fact. In the spring he sowed his seeds: carrots, parsnips, sweet corn, zucchini, cucumbers, beetroot, and others. He planted the tomatoes, the lettuce and brassicas for summer eating. As the warmth came, both in his hothouses and in the seasonal time, he saw the tomato plants green up, break into pale flowers, form their firm fruit, and flesh out into generous tomatoes. He saw the green fronds of the carrots richly green against the soil, and the even darker leaves of the parsnips. Celery vied with the parsnips for richness of foliage, and the dark red of the rhubarb showed beneath its large leaves.

On time the sweet corn tasselled, its pollen reaching the silky threads of the germinal cobs. Onions became bulbous and firmed out into maturity. The mixed herbs gave off their fragrance, particularly when they were crushed underfoot. The strawberries ripened, red against their fronded leaves, and the new beans began pressing up through the soil.

He could never quite get used to the joy of daily harvesting. Buckets of tomatoes, long, green and cool cucumbers, shining zucchini, soft and young for salads or grown and matured for vegetable flesh. The brilliant red of the radish would vie with the white flesh of the parsnips and the purple tops of the turnips. Sometimes he would use a barrow to contain just one cabbage as he wheeled it towards an astonished audience. Lettuce would come soft and crisp from the hot-house beds.

He knew soil did not exist on its own. It related to birds, and bees and insects. Just flooding the soil with fertiliser,

manures and water did not make it, necessarily, into anything. It had to have a time to absorb new elements. Its internal structure changed slowly. It had to be given time. Soil physics might have seemed a dull subject, but now he knew its value. He knew the value of magpies and peewits, and he knew that some kind of a balance was required to get worms to love his soil and infest it, to have magpies that were not afraid of insecticides or vanquished by them. He knew where the snails cached themselves, and he destroyed them gently. He didn't mind the bird life taking its tithe of strawberries or soft tomatoes: there was to be plenty for all.

'And all this,' he thought, 'is to help me to understand the soil of the human heart.' This was because he was a preacher. This was because he had once had a hard and bitter soil for his own heart. It had been filled with gravel and stones and even boulders. Indeed there had been much rock, but minimal soil.

Some unseen gardener had come and worked on his soil. In the mystery of the Kingdom, a transformation had begun to take place. The wild, turbulent weeds—bitter thistles and scraggy thorns had been firmly eliminated. The soil was too fitting for them. It was being prepared for better things.

He remembered the turbulence of those early years, for every child is born into a world already thick with pride and problems. His own restlessness had been like gully winds gusting their way up the valleys of his being and laying back the little foliage that had flourished. Sometimes he seemed like a desert—hard and dry and, for that matter, sterile. Other times he was like the playground of a cyclone, torn by titanic winds, or battered by harsh storms. Much of his soil had been set to grow unprofitable weeds, or crabby, bitter fruit, or even to bring about the sterility of disaster.

He was glad, then, that someone had worked on his poor soil, and had infinite patience in regenerating it. Yet it took him years to understand that 'My Father is the husband-

man'. Decades of patient toil were unrecognised until one day the seed lodged in the heart, and there were few weeds to choke its growth, no basic sterility to oppose life, and indeed everything to encourage the seed to stir and germinate, to grow and to flourish.

It was only when he recognised the miracle of his own heart and its soil, that he began to understand the soil in others. When he preached he could detect and discern what he needed to know. The seed he broadcast seemed often to be snatched away, and to grow and wither as he had seen it in his own untutored land. Some grew, but in soil redolent with weeds also, and weeds that choked the life from the true plants. He understood the weeds of life, the succulent growth of evil, the fascination and seduction of evil, and the tragedy of final death.

So he became patient in his true gardening, the cultivation of the human heart. He saw the gravel, and the rocks and the boulders, and became deft and adept in moving the earth, changing its character. Of course he knew he was not doing one whirr of this, not effecting any regeneration out of his own resources, but as an under-gardener he was learning from the true Husbandman, and was indeed ready to do His bidding and work from His wisdom.

As the years went by he saw the trophies of their wise gardening. He saw true growth, true fruitfulness, true maturing of the growth of the genuine seed. If he exulted in his mind for rich vegetables, then more he exulted in his mind for true human fruitfulness.

More years added themselves to the past ones, and he realised the blessing of patience. The Lord of the harvest was patient—to that needed point—with the unfruitful fig tree, with soil that brought forth thistles and thorns. He had good things in mind for a soil that would be patient under the grace of judgement, as the grace of grace.

So then, as he worked with the soil that slipped through

his fingers in soft, friable loaminess, so he delighted in the transformation of human soil, that dust that is transformed into the very likeness and image of God, and which glows with His glory. He delighted, gently and deeply, that he was a gardener to tend and to keep the true garden, and even if he were to go forth weeping, bearing precious seed, he would surely come again with joy, carrying the sheaves of the true harvest, and the fruit of the Spirit of life. All of this lay at the feet of his Beloved, the Master Gardener Himself.

You made the magpies

You made the magpies. I hear them chortling
 In the early dawn. Their joyous warbling
 Awakes my spirit, sets my thought afresh
 On the glad road of enquiry. I ask (naturally enough)
 ‘Why the magpies, and what their function?’—
 I have this curious thing of utility enquiry—
 ‘Why this, why that, and what at this time or ever?’
 It is a weakness I have, this mind for utility.

‘This morning I am glad of the warbling,
 The cheerful chuckling of the black-and-white
 Prying the bark or the grass for the juicy grub,
 The visiting worm, or the chance caterpillar.
 I see the utilitarian meaning, yet not really:
 I am glad that God makes such noises in the morning.
 His intimations in the before-light awaken me
 To the reality of His presence, His being around,
 Especially when my mind is working
 like a furious piston, a ceaseless cylinder,
 Unresting in its persistent enquiry.

I have watched the magpies feeding:
 Most junior must wait, and then less junior:
 First there is most senior—the prince or princess—

And after them in order of the pecking
 Less junior to most. What do I learn?
 (Do I always *have* to, *need* to, learn?)
 I learn that there is order, not confusion
 In the reality of the universe.

Most I learn is that God is around.
 This is comfort to me (the one of little faith)
 That He neither slumbers nor sleeps,
 And when I sleep not He is awake,
 Speaking to heart of all my needs.
 He has no insomnia but His is unfailing care
 For the vast needs of His created universe.
 Else why the incarnation of the holy Son
 And why the chortling, the grumbling and the warbling
 Of the magpies in the light before dawn
 In the time when the light comes to its spreading?

Tottering over a hill



As you go up the hill, you see the blue sky arching away from you. As you advance, it recedes, but it doesn't really. It comes to you also. You get closer to it, and yet you never arrive. The crest of the hill looks down at you, as you look up at it. Then, with an effort of breathing and pushing your old legs forward, you make it to the top of the hill. Then there is a bit of a gasp as you regain your breath. You lose that breath again as you look over the hill, down on to the sweeping flats beneath.

Before the flats there are low hills, undulating, making curved lines across the landscape. Clusters of green trees pattern the whole world of grass-green. A river lies in it all, like a flat silver tract of water. This is what you hadn't seen, pressing up the hill. You are tired, yet you are not tired. Nevertheless you sit on a rock, flat and easy to cope with. Your legs tremble a little as you sit, and the rock sends warmth into you, for which you are grateful. Suddenly, but not too suddenly, you feel freedom -flow along your mind, and down through your body. You don't mind being old. Isn't that it? You don't mind being old.

Coming up the hill you did mind. You felt stronger than your body, and you wanted to cry, like a disappointed child. The legs trembled, and the arms too, in sympathy, although

the arms weren't doing anything other than flail a little uselessly, as though you tried to pull yourself up by grasping the air. How strange! Your heart pounding away like the old thing it was, and a drip of sweat falling from your nose, your bony, bony nose:

Once you had raced up a hill. Sometimes on foot, sometimes on a cycle. Even on a horse, a high gelding or a smooth mare. Then betimes in a vehicle. First a shaky, noisy car, then a solid, steady car, and then finally a long, sleek, smooth car which thrust itself upwards effortlessly. But

day you walked, on your own. There was no one to come with you. Tottering over a hill.

Glow of the sun, warmth of the rock, ease of the body. You could have dozed like any ancient. But you didn't. It eased you down to comfortable memory. (Cantering after calves. Trapping a young bull by the tail, with one hand on his horn, then suddenly, with both hands, throwing him. He was surprised as you whipped his head over neck, and you knelt on him, and they thrust the iron into him. A hot smell of burning hair, a slight sizzle of the flesh, and then him suddenly ut³, with you springing away, and he cantering off with indignation, and a couple of bellowing coughs. You feeling strong.

Or the cow-bails. Long before the shining milking machines had been invented. You with your head nestling in the warm flank of the cow, your seat on the small stool, your legs splayed back, and the first splashing 'ring!' of the warm milk into the metallic bucket gripped between your own flanks. The strong smell of urine and cow dung, harsh to others, but acceptable to you. The steam rising from the hot dung as the first sun rayed up through the mist, sending whorls of mini-rainbow into the air. The clatter of hooves, the small bellow of cowless calves, and the stamp of the tethered gelding as he waited for you to swing the herd

across the first undulation, out of the night paddock.

The Sunday thing. The building that stood silently all the week except for the swallows which nested under the front eaves and spattered the steps with their yearly contributions. The sparrows up in the small belfrey, and the starlings in the gutters. They kept it alive during the week, but it was musty inside. Religious colour spread across the seats when the sun shone through the stained glass. Someone had been early to clean the hint film of dust from the pews. The book-marks had been set according to the lectionary lessons. The minister potted around in his black cassock, and the organist set up her weekly battle with the organ. Finally it summoned up enough air for the weekly voluntary which was always the same, of course: Handel's 'Largo'. Once she had played the wedding march by mistake, and finished it before she noticed the difference.

What could you get from a sermon in that situation? It was so far from school, and the local town, and the stacked stores. It had nothing to do with the Wednesday sales, or the great teams disking the green countryside until wide brown slashes told of a field to be set for oats or barley. What did it have to do with the mysteries that played around in your mind? Mysteries about life and death. Sure, the man in white and black talked of them, but they seemed to be in another world. Even he seemed relieved when the last hymn was finished and people stood around the porch, saying nothing at first, and then awkwardly talking about the weather, and then the crops, and sometimes the Government. The young bloods talked about sport, and looked self-consciously towards the young girls who were arch enough, if it came to that, but underneath were no less interested.

He never quite understood how he had come to leave it. He loved every blade of grass. He rushed the early morning,

and the fresh thrust of cool air from the lower marshy paddocks. He wanted to hear the heavy breathing of the dairy beasts as they stumbled up from their rest, and arched themselves to stretch, and then mooned their way to the dairy. He liked the cans as they slowly filled from the white stream of milk as it flowed through the cooler.

He never quite knew how he came to be in that human situation called the city. The clustered small houses with their fronts to the streets and their backs to each other really worried him. He lay flat on his bed at night, thinking of what people were missing. They only had one another, and in this they were too close. All was too pressing. He silently ripped down the houses in his mind, until each had enough land around it. He sighed for the impossible city.

Then he began to grow. The night dreams disappeared. It was men who mattered. Sometimes he roughed out a poem, a sort of desperate man-feeling little poem. No editor wanted them, and anyway they seemed to be private things. Then the stories began to grow in his mind. Sometimes he felt guilty. Others studied whilst he wrote poems. He wrote the stories in the non-study time. You needed to be free for them. Your mind could range over them. You had to have time to get inside people.

Inside people! He had stared down at them from the pulpits in which he had preached. There was always a mist between him and them. He wanted to blow it away. He wanted a gust to come and take it away. He had tried to communicate, but he wasn't quite sure he knew what it was he wanted to get to them. They felt his emanations, so to speak, but were puzzled. However, they were mildly interested, for they had not sensed this in some of the other students. They marked him out. One day he would say something powerful.

An ominous rumble. A low, threatening storm across the

world. The dictator of the modern-ancient continent gathering the nations about him, preparing to swallow others. The grey line of fear, the miasma spreading out over the nations. The rush to churches. Loyalty suddenly fanning into belated militancy. Life being set aside whilst anxious governments planned to defend against the storm. The last left-overs of a dull Depression being swept up, and hidden away. The factories beginning to be crowded.

What to preach? What to say? Going back into the country and wandering around, trying to find the answer. But you had the answer; long ago you had that. You remembered it was the finest thing of all. The little mission hall, and the man beside himself with excitement. His hands waving as he told powerfully the love of the eternal God. The mystery of the Cross suddenly breaking open to you, and sunlight streaming down into your soul, as the darkness ran before it in fear. He even used the verse, 'Perfect love casts out fear.'

It was gone, that fear. You hadn't known why it was there, this night. But it had been there, maybe even inherited from beyond your own people. It was part of a cloud that covered most of men, and it was gone. You ran, laughed, skipped, cried, shouted, jumped, leaped. You rushed out into a world you had not known. You tried to tell others, but they shook their heads. They even said it: 'Crazy! Crazy, son, that's what you are.' Too big to communicate; too difficult. How tell?

Then you knew you had to. It had to be different from the way you did it in the pulpit. They stared up; you stared down. You started way down in the bowels. They listened on top of the mind. You both shook hands at the door. Failure. Well now, in the army you would have to tell it properly or you would go under.

The heavy tan boots slogging along. At first it was difficult. Blisters, and sore heels. Then the body was tough, tougher

than ever. The skin was tanned, the shoulders were up. The look was strong. You were alert. The spirit was vibrant. You walked swiftly, shuffled smartly, clicked quickly. In the barrack rooms you slept on hard floors with little between you and the boards. Out on bivouac you learned directions. You plotted positions, got lost, found, and developed your sense of place and position.

On leave you saw the mess again. The moral cover was off. Men had fear underneath. Strong emotions capitulated them into situations they had not known would arise. Something was in the air. Sin swirled around, but they called it something else. Men from leave lurched in, and came singing. They were building up the grey areas again, within. You were fighting against it. 'Remember your Creator in the days of your youth.' Where was He, this Creator?

The ship leaving silently, slipping away before the rumours preceded her. The thousands of khaki-clad troops covering the feelings over with rough language and songs, and sometimes curses. The new land and its exotic freshness. The strange customs, the new temptations. The process of being brutalised for the killing to come. The sleek steel of the weapons; the panting, huffing training. The dripping nights in the jungle, the stuck boots in the jungle mud. Black streams almost silent under the trailing vines. Thorns jaggling you, and weariness beating in.

Better things. The long curving sweep of golden sand, the amethyst sea, the delicate sunset against the palm fronds. Special friends, and nights when people sang and danced in their kampongs, and blessed the men with dinners of fruit and foods.

The coming of the enemy, down the long silent peninsula. The sudden action. Men fleeing. The cries of war. Smashed steel, spiked trees with fractured limbs. Men this way too. The long convoys. The black smoke, and the blackened faces and clothes. Despair settling around the shoulders,

bowing them. Some valiant fight-back, some bitter reflexes.

Then the prison. Its barbed wire, and its small-structured men strutting, bowing and watching. The diseases that ate away silently. The miracles of love, and the dreadful acts of hate. The slow deterioration of spirit.

Now, how did you tell it? Indeed, what did you have to tell? What of that Cross now, against these obvious crosses, these excruciations? For the time your mouth was closed, whilst you worked it through, searching for an answer. Loving of course, all the time, as best you could with your bony body, and your aching stomach. It cried for food, and you dreamed for it at night, but when you woke it still cried out.

Here, in the sun, with your tired body relaxing, it all seemed so far away. The despair, the bitterness, and then the sudden, full discovery of God as He is, seemed far away. Those days had been succeeded by others. You had come back to tell, and still it seemed to evade you, the manner and the substance of telling. How puzzled you were.

There was the day when someone had said, 'You have something to tell, and one day you will.'

Then it had come. Gloriously it had come. The whole grey thing within had been swept away. A great tide of glory had rolled over you. Now it was not a misty romantic thing. It was clear. It was not just for emotions. It did not make you tired. You were not on an eternal mercy round without knowing mercy itself. It broke open on you, in you. You knew God! Not just about Him. The things that had been misted over were there, but clear. The clouds had rolled back. You knew! You knew!

Love came flooding down. The hands of the ordaining presbyters closed over your head, some slipping down to the shoulders. Then you knew the inflow into your spirit, power

to know, to feel, to tell.

Here, lying on the hills, it came flowing back, sweetly. Message after message flashed through. Themes vibrating sweetly in his mind. The hills of the Scripture were as real—if not more—as these which stretched before him to his own naked eyes. The King and His Kingdom. The Father and His Family. The Lover and His beloved. The Lord and His liberated. The Spirit and His renewed men of flesh. Stripped of guilt, purged of their past, shining and new as true men and women, they gave the answer to his glorious days in his country experience. They waved through the crowded places of his slums bewilderment. They beckoned through the days over which war-pall had gathered, and they flashed light into hours of prison suffering. ‘These trust their souls to a faithful Creator,’ he felt like crying to the blue arch of the sky.

There were days he called ‘Spirit-days’. God was amongst them, touching men in the depths, pressing away fear from eyes, bringing healing to bodies and minds, brushing off worry and timidity. He had seen men and women grow strong, ready for action, ready to repeat God’s victories. Christ was vibrantly present. The Father was watching and caring. The Spirit was unveiling the mysteries so that they came through, sparkling and clear.

How he had tottered up that hill. The body was weak, and the limbs had trembled. He had had to get over the rim. Every rim had another view to give. Every new view was a shouting about God.

Somewhere, out of it all, rolled back to him the human memory. The eyes he had loved beyond all other eyes. They were quiet, strong and grey. They had followed him gently

wherever he went. Something behind the eyes had followed him. With her had come their children, growing up, growing past him, going out with what he had tried to give. Sometimes he had been too busy and they had sought to find without him. This was the bitter-sweet pang. But she had not failed. She had given, for it flowed from her without words; soundless ideas, you might say, that they had caught.

Then she faded. The warm sun quivered the air, and the day grew unnaturally bright. He had a sensation that death was coming to him as life. The hills flashed beyond themselves into something they were always destined to be. Their bondage snapped and they began an ecstatic paean to the faithful Crew/tot. The skies arched away and slipped together again, in new meaning. The little river broadened and rushed and rolled and floated. The trees bent crazily together, drew back, and literally laughed.

It all bore in on him. His limbs suddenly flowed with new power, enriched vibrancy. A heady sweetness rushed through his body, and his heart grew and grew, until he was standing up, his arms to the sky. His understanding flourished beyond his former greatest moments, and full comprehension poured into him.

‘I know you!’ he cried, as the creation about declared the glory of God. Voice called unto voice with the mighty revelations he had always sensed. Every blade of grass had meaning, every rock a message, and every breath of air was the wine of understanding.

Then came all the voices—human, yet humanity flushed to its full being. Incredibly sweet their praise that poured over the undulating hills with its own powerful curving. Around him it flowed, and he shared in it with his own released utterance.

Down the hill he plunged, his arms in joyous waving. Long green grass of a texture he had never known, and a

colour he had never felt, was like a gentle waving sea about him. Into it he plunged with joy, falling, and rising and falling again, and rising.

Fair waved the corn



HE hummed a little as he dropped the corn seeds into the small drill he had made with the heel of the rake. It was a song that he rather liked. Indeed it was a favourite of his. So he kept humming as he pushed the seed with one finger, gently, into the earth. He kept thinking, 'Now it is sown. It is sown into the finely tilled soil. I am sure it will grow into good green shoots, into healthy plants, and then one day it will produce good cobs for my little family.' A thoughtful man was this sower of sweet corn grain.

After a time he straightened up his back. In fact, he stood and surveyed the lines of his sowing. The soil, he had been told, was basaltic, the result, many millenniums ago, of volcanic action: He sighed a trifle for the dryness and aridity of it when he had first come. The surface had been covered with matted kikuyu grass—that importation from South Africa—but his good friends from the Centre had helped him to clear off the unwanted turf. They had helped him to break open the soil with a rotary-hoe, and had piled on the animal manure and a trifle of artificial fertiliser. It had begun to look like a garden.

His special friend at the Centre was a competent gardener. He was happy to admit this fact, but deep down

he knew that he, too, could garden. Expertise he did not claim to have, but that vague instinct which reassured him that he, also, could garden. So he had taken pride in developing that soil. Being a preacher and a teacher, he found analogies and parables, and even allegories, in his patch of garden.

At the thought of all this, he resumed his humming of the favourite song. Much to his wife's surprise, he began to sing the song. He had Welsh forebears, and songs kept trickling up from his depths. He might be far from winning prizes in an eisteddfod, but he sang with joy. His joy increased as he chatted away to himself. His mind talked whilst his throat and lips sang their constant refrain.

After a time, his bright-eyed wife came to look at the soil. 'Very good,' she said in her half-ironic, half-encouraging way. She and the two girls—the two daughters—relished sweet corn. She liked it on the cob, boiled and piping hot with a covering of butter, and of course the sprinkling over it of salt and pepper. In her mind's eye she could see the golden stuff, nobbled on the cob stem. She nodded at her long lean man, and said, 'It'll be tasty without doubt.'

He was a somewhat absent-minded man. He would think of many things at the one time, and try to carry each stream of thought to some conclusion. You might have called him a dreamer, or a hoper, but then he was more than that. He was a visionary, but a visionary who sought to carry out the visions which came to him. Mostly he succeeded. You could see the aims of his heart in his two pale-blue eyes. In the pulpit they could be strong and stern, even fierce, but there was humour which relieved the intensity and told you the man was human. If he felt life too deeply, then he compensated by living it richly. He was human in an ordinary way, a way that had to do with food and fun, with exercise, and with action. That was why people did not mind being closeted with him in the study. They could open their hearts,

tell their troubles, and receive the comfort and healing that he conveyed to them.

Today he was the gardener. In his various roles he wore a variety of hats. Somewhat balding, he rarely wore a literal hat. Today there was one, pushed to the back of his head in the sight of the spring sun. Generally he wore the hats of a preacher-teacher, a counsellor, a father, a husband and a friend. They all sat well upon him. He had a puckish sense of humour. He also possessed a mild but efficient kind of cunning. He could play the helpless one to his wife's helpful efficiency. He would be the absent-minded academic when it came to her care for him: he let her spoil him hopelessly whilst he seemed not to understand that the care lavished on him was very special. It stemmed from the days when she had adored him without limit. He never gave the appearance of deliberate carelessness: he simply acknowledged that for him, being special, this was how things should be, that this was how they were bound to be.

The two girls came out to look at the drills of sown seed. They, too, had the good humour of their parents. So the comments, dry and friendly, kept breaking into the spring air. They wondered, aloud, whether the corn might be better, even, than that of their friend Godfrey at the Centre. The Centre was up on the Hill, some four miles away, and the vast vegetable garden there seemed to dwarf their Dad's efforts.

He smiled at that, his puckish confidence breaking through, his blue eyes dancing. 'We'll show him this year,' he said, 'that we can do even better than with the onions.'

He was proud of his onions, and of the onion experiment. His father had given him hundreds of onion plants one year, and he had planted every one of them. They had been static over the cold winter, but in the spring they had taken life:

they had grown abundantly, outpacing the onions in the Centre garden. They had thrust their green spikes proudly into the spring air, and before you could preach many sermons they had been true, well filled out, full-orbed onions, swollen to good maturity. Some of them had been brown, and some of them white, and all of them fat and fit. How he had surprised the Team with their fleshy success! He and his wife were greatly rewarded by the astonishment of Godfrey the leader, the special gardener of the Cent-re soil.

‘I think,’ he said, with his normal assumption of modesty, ‘that we will have better corn than his.’ They all knew this to be the father of a wish, and grinned in their loyal family way. In fact, unbelief was in the four hearts, but they enjoyed the humour.

At different times he would come out to survey the garden. This would be mainly in the evening, just before the meal. In some ways he was like a minor lord, surveying his half-acre of basaltic soil. They had done well with the few fruit trees, the native shrubs, and a modest garden of flowers. Even so, it was the vegies which always caught his eye. His green peas contrasted richly with the pale red soil. Tomatoes gave promise of things to come. The inevitable onions were on their flourishing way to maturity, and the small cucumbers battled bravely towards the day when they would yield their fleshy fruit. Altogether he had reason to be proud. Sometimes he wondered whether he ought to think so often and so deeply about Godfrey and the Centre garden. On these occasions he would sigh and hope for the best.

What he never declared to anyone was his vestigial religious superstition regarding his vegetables. Mind you, it was not limited to him. Much of the human race has this superstition. It continues to read the portents, hoping for Fate to be kindly. Adverse days send it into gloom. Bright and shining days increase its hopes. This, of course, is sheer

pagan superstition, and not to be tolerated in a healthy Christian person. He knew that of course: but then why did he persist in thinking that failure in a crop really meant the hand of God was upon him, in a sort of judgement; that somehow he had failed the generally gracious Providence?

This vestigial superstition made the matter of vegetable growing a bitter-sweet affair. His rational mind told him that if he tilled well, sowed well, watered and cared well, then the crops would be O.K. If he failed to feed the soil with compost, animal manures, and a touch here and there of required minerals, then of course his crop would not succeed: certainly not riotously. What he dreaded in the back recesses of his mind was to be a total failure. It was not that he was haunted by this thought day and night, that he awakened nights thinking about it, but it was there, bringing faint apprehension and a touch of incipient uneasiness. He was, in fact, one with the human race which has always had similar feelings.

He needed, of course, to come to terms with this problem. He sought to do so. That slight fear—back of his mind— would dissolve in a trice when he was preaching, teaching or counselling. Then he could laugh at it, for his faith in God was most robust at such times. When, however, his very sensitive conscience came out to work in the late evenings, he would gaze with a slight sadness at his coming crops, and just wonder. His theology laughed at these ghost-thoughts for the idiots that they were, but then he was a man of heart, and sometimes ghost-guilts would arise to make him feel foolish, and wistful.

The days of his onion-triumph came to pass. These were the days when he stuffed the fat onions lavishly into hessian sacks and loaded them into his small blue car. He travelled boisterously to the Hill and the Centre. He laid them out in

the view of his friends and the admiring and rueful Godfrey, who without doubt praised his great success and wondered inwardly how their dreamy friend could accomplish so great a feat. Yet even in this praise-evoking triumph, the thought faintly haunted the onion-grower that maybe his sweet corn crop could fail. The thought troubled him deeply, but he hid it from wife, family and friends.

At times he would pop out of the house to see that the maize was well and properly watered. He would set the misty garden spray spurting in the cool evening. Later he would prod the soil to see that the water had penetrated, and then, with a sigh, he would go to his study to work out a message, or to his family to share the television, and think how crazy he was to be so moved about a small crop of sweet corn.

His first doubt came about the time he was due to go interstate for an important conference. He was not averse to being 'a conference speaker'. He rather liked the ritual of it all: the booking of the air-tickets, the luggage-packing, the being taken to the airport, the descent to the destination airfield, and then the greetings, the hospitality, the strange things of a different city, and—of course—the conference itself. How good it was to share his convictions, his special insights, his groomed utterances, his spontaneous proclamations!

What troubled him, however, was the watering of the garden. Hot days could come suddenly. The garden could droop so quickly under the pitiless and hot north-easterlies. The soil could dry so rapidly, and the wind could dehydrate the plants almost in a jiffy.

So he gave good and thorough instructions to his bright and intelligent wife. He was tall and lean: she was short and not unplump. He was earnest: her eyes barely concealed the laughter she had at his intensity. She calmed him with smooth assurances. Of course she would not neglect the

water: had she ever done so? Yes, she had done, and not only on one occasion. His memory was sharp in regard to such matters. She knew, sadly, that this was the case: his memory in these matters was indefatigable. But she promised him with much love, and he hesitantly accepted the assurance.

Soon he was on his way, high in the atmosphere, ensconced in the silver plane, and humbly enjoying his small claim to preachy fame, and the modest mid-morning snack that the airline company provided. Thoughts of the crop were almost out of his mind. Indeed his mind was on higher things, such as special insights he had gained, new understandings, meaningful matters, and aids to richer living.

It was shortly after this feast of thinking that they touched down at the airport.

It was during the conference that his mind suddenly reverted to the sweet corn. Now you may think that was a small and inconsequential matter, and generally speaking you would be right; but when you link up this visitation of thought with that faint incipient guilt relating to blessing on crops for right obedience, and the warning that spiritual infidelity would be visited with judgements—even crop judgements—then you must not underrate the thinking of this fine and thoughtful preacher. What flashed across his mind was that his fine and wonderful wife might forget—at times—to water his sweet corn. The thought, of course, was intolerable, but it persisted, wedging itself in between higher and more noble thoughts. Of course, as he declaimed powerfully from the rostrum, the public podium, the pleasant pulpit, his words flowed well, and without recourse to crop successes or any such thing. Indeed he was strong in his proclamation, which utterly scandalised some, and delighted others in that concourse of intelligent and tertiary-trained listeners.

On his way home, reclining in the plane, sipping his non-

sweet brown tea and eating his allotment of two biscuits in frugal manner, the thought flashed in on him again: sweet corn! Of course he thought of tomatoes, peas, beans, cabbage and the like, but especially in his mind was the sweet corn. For a moment it blocked out the failures and successes of his conference addresses. It loomed up large in his meditative mind, until he recognised there was something obsessive about the matter and he dismissed it with a flourish of Stoic sternness.

His positive wife met him at the airport with her business-like manner, helping him get the luggage, driving him towards their Hills home. He asked, a trifle diffidently, 'And the garden—how is it?'

'Good, I should think,' she said, and he wondered whether he detected a slight note of indecision in her voice. She, however, had passed on to other subjects—those concerned with the children.

He wasted little time getting to his beloved garden, and sure enough, there was his sweet corn, all headed with waving plumes and flowing with cob tassels. He felt somewhat comforted, and got back to the business of life such as the evening meal, the phone calls, the arranged interviews, and a pleasant rumination on the days of conference.

The next morning he was out in the garden early, putting on the water-sprays. First, however, he tested the corn garden. He found the soil dry, and, he thought, 'inordinately dry'. The plants looked healthy enough, but the sheathed cobs looked long and narrow, as though they contained no substance. That day he sought out the expert, Godfrey of the Centre vegetable garden.

He said to him, 'When do you know the corn is ready to pick?'

'The tassels,' Godfrey told him. 'They have to be dry, very dry. Also if you feel the cob you will know there is grain. You can feel it under the sheath. Then of course, if in

doubt peel the tassel back slightly. In fact, slit it with a knife and you'll soon know.'

He had felt no substance in the cobs; he knew that. The tassels had been dry, very dry, brown-dry in fact. When he returned to the garden he felt quite troubled. Godfrey had told him about his son-in-law's crop of sweet corn. Twelve months ago it had ripened and nary a cob had matured: it had all been empty.

What follows now must be read carefully and thoughtfully. The well-known and beloved preacher-teacher had a revisitation of his ancient and incipient guilt. If the crop turned out to be futile, then maybe Providence was trying to get a message through to him. His theological sense told him this was not so, but some atavistic concept, some lingering strand of superstition nagged and worried him. The Good Book had said, 'I smote you with blight and mildew; I laid waste your gardens and your vineyards.' He had no vineyards, and when he looked anxiously at the garden it was not laid waste. However, some wasting disease may have been at his corn-cobs. He thought about Godfrey's son-in-law's empty cobs of yesteryear.

That was why he approached the cob-testing with some trepidation. He gently folded back the sheath-leaves of the first cob. His heart sank. There was nothing! This was the same with the next and yet the next: each cob was void of grain. Sadly he folded the cob-coverings back over the emptiness and submitted himself to the disaster. He had also had a faint sense that when he was uncovering the cobs, it was a bit like trying to see the state of the churches, as in 'Are they fruitful or unfruitful?' 'Ah!' he thought sorrowfully, 'I, too, am unfruitful. Who am I to be critical of the lack of growth in persons and churches?'

Godfrey was a bit more philosophical. 'Could have been

anything,' he said. 'Maybe you missed out watering them at the critical time.'

'Missed out watering.' The preacher's ears pricked up at that.

Later he said to his worthy and efficient wife, 'Did you by chance forget to water the garden on any occasion?' He could tell by her eyes that she had.

'Well,' she said slowly, 'I guess I forgot.' When she had finished her story, he was gloomy.

'O.K.,' he said sadly and pityingly, 'we just have to accept that.' He saw a whole crop of sweet corn as having failed because of lack of watering. He had no anger in his heart, but nevertheless gloomed on for some time.

When next he saw Godfrey, he spread out his hands in gentle despair. 'I guess I'll have to pull it all out.'

'Pull what out?' asked Godfrey, whose mind was not on sterile sweet corn plants.

'The sweet corn,' he said. 'It's all barren.'

It was then that Godfrey remembered. 'No watering, eh?' he asked. 'Did she forget to water?'

'She' was seated next to her husband, and nodded contritely. 'I just forgot,' she said plaintively.

Her husband gallantly waved away her fault. 'I'll pull it out this afternoon. Then I can get busy putting in some new crop.'

'Very sad,' observed Godfrey, 'very sad indeed.' He sighed. 'A whole crop, eh?' he said. He thought of a whole mass of virgin cobs, white to creamy, grain like warm pearls set in crowded and clustered rows, and the whole delicious feast of it lost to human lips and human delight. He sighed again.

The useless plants were not torn out that day, nor uprooted the next. There were phone calls, emergencies, meetings and

counsellings. A week piled up, levelled out, disappeared. A few more days dissipated, and then the memory of the offending plants came crowding back again. Steeling himself for the event, the preacher-teacher sallied forth with ruthless determination. It was simply from plaintive curiosity that the gardener peeled back a few sheath-leaves on the first cob, and to his amazement he saw that this particular cob had corn on it. He rushed along the rows, opening the cobs to sunlight, and lo! they were all fructified!

He was delirious, simply delirious. You say—and reasonably so—'But surely you are overplaying this game?' Really? When incipient guilt has troubled its host, and when the ancient remnant of fear of judgement has reared its accusing head,' can the success of the crop be so minimised? Where now are the blight and the mildew, the blasting, the laying waste of the garden and the like? They are *non est!* They never were! Instead is blessing and fruitfulness.

He thought, 'And there was I, blaming it all on to my wife, or thinking Providence was chastising me, and it was none of that. Ah! And what of looking curiously into the cobs beneath their sheaths as though I were examining the growth of God in the churches, in lives, in all places. What inexcusable peering and prying! What lack of trust in Divine Providence!'

He felt the sense of genuine repentance in his soul, but that did not depress him. Rather, it was most liberating. He ran towards the house. He would see her, his good wife.

'It's good! It's good!' he was shouting. 'The corn's O.K. ! We'll have cobs for dinner and cobs for tea!' He was of course slightly hysterical in his joy, and his calm wife knew that as he swung her around by the waist with his long lean fingers. Any guilt she may have felt over the missed watering had vanished, and instead she was a bit proud of her preacher-gardener husband.

So she responded. He for his part was vowing he would

dice his vestigial remnant of religious superstition and would just go in for honest gardening as the situation demanded— come wind, come weather!

He thought that decision was very good, and so now applied himself to the more intimate details of a relationship which always seemed to flourish well under joy. Nevertheless, at the back of his mind he could see the swelled cobs in all their creamy freshness, and he felt within him a swelling of genuine and permissible pride.

Condemn me not for straw

If there is some gold amongst my straw
 It is yours. I offer it to you.
 if there is straw among my gold
 Burn it, if and as you will—
 It is nothing to me. Most of life
 I have been seeking the gold.
 Sad it may be that times once were
 When I thought my gold was straw,
 My straw was gold. In the discernment
 Are times of failure, times of pain,
 This is the costing of the search for truth.
 Forgive me my failures.

If, in your search for truth,
 Your yearning for the true unchangeable,
 The immutable reality of God,
 You have chanced on my treasures,
 Recognise this obvious fact:
 These treasures are not mine.
 Sometimes I carve them out on dark nights
 From chanted-upon lodes of glory,
 Some power that guides my vagrant feet
 Leads me to dark mountainsides,
 Helping me scale its ravines,
 To mine the treasure that is hid.

Sometimes I see these treasures prodigally
 Scattered across the ways of life—
 Old paths that seekers once had trod
 And left their treasures in their careless joy,
 Hoping some needy' (following on)
 Would share their currency of love—
 And so with breathless joy I gather them,
 Storing them in my unkempt warehouse,
 Hoping for great display—
 God's constant day of grace in simple exhibition.

If there be gold or precious jewels,
 If there be treasures marvellous
 In the dull warehouse of my gathering,
 Take them for yours, use and pass them on.
 Born in palaces we live as poor,
 Biting and bitter, angry and sore,
 Demanding of God and fellow man
 Our imagined rights, our needs fulfilled,
 When—blind to the eternal prodigality—
 We grovel, scabble in the dust,
 Seeking fulfilment of the need
 In the mean dust of our blind endeavours.

When all is said, I have one mine,
 But one old mine to dig and take—
 The mine of the hill of Calvary
 Old Golgotha's seam of love,
 Exposed to the scarring of the desperate mine
 With riches for the heart that craves.
 Millenniums of time there be
 When streams of sad and dry humanity
 Bypass this hill, give but one glance
 And go their way. This is my source of gold.
 Join with me if you will.

If there is straw amongst my gold,
 This is my wrong gathering, some myopic chance
 That took it with the gold: forgive, forgive,
 And note—in passing—that the gold is soaked in tears,
 The soggy straw is limp of life.
 It's gold that matters and the gathering's pain.
 I loved you or had kept the gold myself—
 Condemn me not for straw!
 See too, see too, my precious, precious Gold!

The good man



There was once a man called ‘a good man’. It is not a term we use freely about men, although, to be sure, it has been used. A rich young leader of the local Jewish synagogue addressed Jesus as ‘good Master!’ He himself knew this to be a high title, but he used it without flattery because he believed the man he was addressing to be a good person.

Jesus’ answer seemed to be unduly and ungratefully blunt. He said, ‘You call me good. Why do you call me good? There is none good but God.’ Some have surmised that Jesus wanted him to think more deeply about what he was saying, and so not use so high a title lightly. Others have thought that Jesus was asking a question, ‘Do you really say that I am God, seeing you call me good?’

Whatever the purpose of Jesus, he has certainly taught us not to use the term lightly and never for the purpose of flattery.

The term, nevertheless, was often used in the great days of the Hebrews when they lived in their unique covenant with God. A good man was one who did good, ie. carried out goodness. He lived with the God of goodness, of *tob*,

which was a Hebrew word for ‘delights’, since His creation was (is) ‘very good’, and His land was ‘good’, His seven years of crops ‘good’; and so on. Even the wayward Hebrew knew that it was ‘the goodness of God which leads to repentance’. In God are great stores of goodness, and nothing of evil.

The good man of whom we wish to speak was named Ahimaaz. On a momentous occasion when he was running swiftly towards David the king, that great monarch said, ‘He is a good man, and comes with good tidings.’ The king knew his man: he knew he would not run like that unless he were bringing good tidings. It seemed that Ahimaaz was always a man of helpful tidings.

Probably Ahimaaz would have been surprised to hear the king’s evaluation of himself. It would have had a high sound, that, ‘He is a good man’. Ahimaaz would have been puzzled.

On another occasion an angel said to Gideon, ‘Hail! You mighty man of valour!’ Gideon may well have looked over his shoulder to see whether another was being addressed! ‘Valour’ was the last word he would have applied to himself. God applied it to him, and because He did, the man Gideon was identified as a mighty man of valour, and so he became, albeit through many trials and tests, and learning to trust God for valour, and not at all to place confidence in himself.

When, therefore, David nominated Ahimaaz as a good man, so his character and fame passed down through history, generation after generation. Men could say, ‘There was once a good man’, so that it could be known that all in the human race were not—and are not—failures- Man eagerly treasures up the good men and women of the human race, building the tombs of the prophets, and canonising the saints, seeking sometimes to emulate them, but, anyway, resting upon their good deeds, as though to say, ‘You see!

We humans can be good, if we will! It may take effort, and labour, but we can do it: blessed if we can't!

He stood straight as a' die, this man. Not long ago he had been slim and tall as a young birch, for he was young himself. I don't know but that he stood firmly, legs apart as often strong men stand, but now he was no longer slim. He was a grown man, and he had grown well to get to what he now was, and to what he was now doing.

He had a long history, this man Ahimaaz. History was to see his father as famous, one of the two priests who lived in David's court. Royal priests you might call them, because they carried out the rich rituals and strong sacrifices of the great tent, the holy tabernacle, the place called 'God's dwelling'.

You might say Ahimaaz alternated between tent and palace, between worship and work of the State. It depends how you understand the things of those days. They didn't think in terms of 'church' and 'State', of 'religion' and 'secularity'. They had a great God—their One called Yahweh, and the Kingdom of the people was His as much as the temple and the worship they offered Him.

No man had a better start than Ahimaaz, as we are about to see, but then a man can have a good start and turn out to be bland, or spoiled, or even evil. Not so Ahimaaz, as I will show you, or as history has shown us. He was given a special title, but, because that is part of the great story, I hide this precious tidbit and work up to it for our best surprise.

As I was saying, no man had a better start to life. He was what you might call 'a son of the tent', a tent that was holy, and filled with immediate mystery of God. It was a place in which the young Ahimaaz wandered as a boy, anyway as far as the great altar of sacrifice where the fire burned day and night, until the stones upon it had become permanently

white with the heat. He had watched—at first perhaps with horror and later with awe and understanding—the sacrifices which were offered.

It was there he learned about man in his guilt, man in his confession of sins, and man in the relief of the grace of guiltlessness. Men came, grim with that guilt, and they left with peace and dawning joy. It was a great place—the altar—and he loved the endless drama of it.

Beyond the altar and the great laver for priestly washing, there was the holy place. He dared not wander there, but he knew that each day the shewbread, with its tantalising freshness and fragrance, would be placed within it, along with the incense that was used at prayer times, the soft golden lights of the seven-branched candelabra. No doubt he loved it all as he grew because he was a son of the tent.

The Ultimate Mystery must have gotten to him, also: the Mystery which made him the strong man that he became. Each year there would be the great sacrifice of the Atonement, when his father would join Abiathar the great high priest, to gather the blood from the dripping victims. Abiathar—and perhaps some years Zadok his own priestly father—would take the blood in a bowl and approach the Holy of Holies, parting the curtains with awe and reverence, and, unseen to the breathless congregation, would come into the presence of The Most Holy.

There, on the mercy seat of the Ark of the Covenant, the high priest would sprinkle the blood. Two cherubim—strange and beautiful creatures of God—would overshadow the Place of Grace, and as the blood was sprinkled the weeping and joy of the people would be heard. Valued as were the personal offerings, the burnt and sin offerings, this great act of Atonement assured them that every sin had been covered, and they were now the people-without-guilt. Envied were they in all the world for being the people of sacrifice. It was in this environment that the boy Ahimaaz grew to

be an adolescent, a young man, then a man of maturity. The wisdom of his father entered into him, and he became a son of the altar. Himself destined for priesthood, he was part of a great saga which began with Aaron the brother of Moses, and first priest to the liberated people of God. Aaron's third son Eleazor had been priest to God and ancestor to Ahimaaz.

In the same tent was Abiathar the high priest. He too had a great history. He and his family had been loyal to David, so much so that Saul—that dark and gloomy monarch—had massacred the family, and only Abiathar had escaped. He had brought the holy ephod to David, joining him at Keilah, and remaining with him. He—Abiathar—with Zadok, were the priestly courtiers who gave counsel to the king, the gracious and charismatic David who held the hearts of the common people.

Ahimaaz lived in the excitement of tent and court, in godliness and stateliness. He saw the rhythm of passions that moved the sons and daughters of the royal family. He saw the beauty of Absalom that most princely of men, the quiet fires in the eyes of Solomon the youngest son, and the thoughts and actions of Adonijah who was to be Abiathar's aspirant to the throne. It was all there, in both court and tent, and the young Ahimaaz flourished. He became the man of tent and court, because he knew awe of the Altar, and loyalty to the Throne.

He knew the throne was David's throne, but beyond that it was the Throne of Yahweh Himself, and David was His chosen Prince. The LORD had said to the young Lord, 'Sit thou at My right hand until I make thy enemies thy footstool.' Maybe the young Ahimaaz had seen in vision or sensed in mind the Messiah—'great David's Greater Son'—for whose coming some in Israel longed and prayed. We do not know.

This man had become a marathon runner. Years later a

prophet-priest—such as had been the great Samuel—was to run twenty-six miles from Mount Carmel to Jerusalem, fresh with victory over the false prophets of Baal and the nature-groves. This Ahimaaz, nevertheless, was no less in power of running than the later Elijah. He was known as the speediest in the land.

The day of Absalom's insurrection came as a shock to the court and the tent-temple. Abiathar and Zadok took up the Holy Ark—for only priests were allowed to handle it—and they followed King David as he fled from the holy city, Jerusalem. They set the Ark at the gate of the city until all loyal to David had fled the place, but the king insisted they go back to the tent, reinstate the Ark, and remain at court.

He spoke to Zadok: 'Look! Go back to the city in peace, you and Abiathar, with your two sons, Ahimaaz your son, and Jonathan the son of Abiathar. See, I will wait at the ford of the wilderness, until word comes from you to inform me.' Zadok and Abiathar were to be silent spies for David, and the two young men, Ahimaaz and Jonathan, were to be secret messengers bringing vital intelligence material to the king.

A loyal courtier and counsellor was a man of famous history named Hushai the Archite. On David's advice he too remained to confound the young Absalom with a wisdom which so influenced the rebel prince that he eventually lost his newly gained kingdom. Hushai the Archite was able to cancel the brilliant wisdom of Ahithophel, and it was by the hand of the two priestly sons that he sent the message of cunning counsel.

The two young runners, coming under suspicion, had had to leave the royal city, and were sheltering at a place called Enrogal, to which a maidservant would bring them the information they were to pass on to the king. In this case the information was urgent, but as they were about to take it they were spotted by a lad who, seeing them, told Absalom.

The rebel prince sent servants to seize the two men, but they had been hidden, ingeniously, by the woman of the house into which they had fled. She had placed them in a well, covered it over with a cloth, scattering grain over it, so that the young runners we're not caught. Instead they took the news to David, and the news saved the day for the king and his loyalist troops. In this sense Ahimaaz and Jonathan were saviours of the king and the kingdom. Their faithfulness to court and tent marked them out as men of greatness.

It was after this that the tragic battle took place in which David—without knowing it—was victorious. Twenty thousand men fell in the war that decimated Absalom's followers, and found that young man caught in a tree. The Chronicles says, 'And Absalom chanced to meet the servants of David. Absalom was riding upon a mule, and the mule went under the thick branches of a great oak, and his head caught fast in the oak, and he was left hanging between heaven and earth.'

Joab, David's famous general, although previously commanded by David to spare the life of his rebel son, should he be captured, made short work of the hanging Absalom, thrusting three darts into his heart. Absalom's troops had fled with shame to their own homes: the battle was ended, and David triumphant. As yet, however, David had not heard the news of the victory, nor of the death of his beautiful son.

Ahimaaz was eager to bring news to the king. He said to Joab, 'Let me run, and carry tidings to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the power of his enemies.' The runner was in no doubt of his theology. It was God who had delivered David. The 'son of the tent' knew the high office of the throne of Israel. He wanted to bring joy to his monarch. His mind was set on the great run that would first bring the good news to the king.

Joab was an astute general and courtier. He knew King

David, and that the monarch would come into great grief with the news that his son had been killed. In his grief he might have the messenger of these sad tidings destroyed. Joab, being a strong man, could take responsibility for action in destroying the rebel prince. He knew well enough that Absalom—given the reprieve of his life—would further plot against the king and next time win his coup.

The great general must have loved the younger Ahimaaz. Doubtless Joab and Zadok were friends at court, each respecting the other.

'You are not to go,' he said. 'You are not to carry tidings today; you may carry tidings another day, but today you shall carry no tidings because the king's son is dead.'

Joab then selected a Cushite, an Ethiopian of dark skin, perhaps to symbolise the gloom of tragedy. We cannot be certain, but it seems to have been that way. David, seeing the Cushite, would conclude, even before the news was given by mouth, that his beloved son had perished.

It is at this point we grasp the intense nature of the man Ahimaaz. It was innate to him to run, to bear good tidings. He had no desire to tell the king of Absalom's death, but he was bursting with the joy of David's victory. He had said to Joab, 'Let me run and carry tidings to the king that the Lord has delivered him from the power of his enemies.' That was the good news: deliverance to the king, the preservation of God's anointed; and the victory of tent and throne for the holy people of God.

He was the true son of the priestly counsellor Zadok, of the servant of the Holy Tent. Thus he wanted to run.

Joab said to the Cushite, 'Go, tell the king what you have seen.' The dark courier began his long run to David, but Ahimaaz struggled with his impatience. His whole being yearned to be evangelist to his monarch, to carry good news. The son of a priest, and the offspring of a courtly counsel-

lor, he must get this news to the king. He may not have resented the privilege accorded to the Ethiopian, but he wanted the king to hear news of joy before news of disaster.

He begged Joab, importuning him, 'Come what may, let me also run after the Cushite.'

Joab said, 'Why will you run, my son, seeing that you will have no rewards for the tidings?'

Rewards for tidings! The thought had never entered the man's mind. Bringing good news is its own reward. The joy of the king would be ample repayment if ever that was what one wanted.

Later a great prophet—known as the 'evangelical prophet'—was to say,

How beautiful upon the mountains
are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
who publishes peace,
who brings good tidings of good,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, 'Your God reigns!'

Ahimaaz was an evangelist at heart. He had good news to proclaim. It was God who reigned on Mount Zion and not the disloyal Absalom.

Ahimaaz addressed the general with urgency and insistence. 'Come what may,' he said, 'I will run.'

'Come what may' meant 'Even if the king kills me', but he doubted that. He would bring only good news.

'Run,' said Joab, and the man Ahimaaz ran for his dear life.

The Cushite was far ahead by this time, but it was not joy that sped his feet. He may have caught the note in Joab's voice and anticipated the anger of the king. Even so, he was a servant and must obey his master, the general. So he ran.

Ahimaaz ran. Equally in his mind was the ghoulis scene where the body of Absalom was taken and flung into a great

pit in the forest, the stones being piled over the traitorous son of Israel's greatest king. For Cushie, this might have been dangerous news to bring. For Ahimaaz, Absalom's death was but a seal to the greater news of the king's victory.

He ran. Tradition has it that he ran a longer route than Cushie was taking. Perhaps he wanted to evade any last remnants of battle in the wood, ensuring that he would reach the king. We do not know. We do know he took the road across the valley of the Jorad, a straight road, even if a longer distance.

It is in this we see the magnificence of the man, and his great vocation as a runner. Hail! The fleet priest, the running servant, of the Lord! He ran no less for the monarch than for the King of kings.

It is not difficult to visualise him, to enter into his sheer joy, his fierce insistence of rapidity of travel, of fleetness of foot. The joy of a runner is known only to him who has run. So he ran, outpacing the Ethiopian, and bursting with the good news.

At Mahanaim David was sitting between the two gates, watching. Height was needed to better see what might be happening, so the official watchman went up to the roof of the gate, the city watchtower, and he espied the foremost runner.

He called to the king, 'I see a man running.'

The king said, 'If he is alone there are tidings in his mouth.' The king knew that had there been many running they may have been fugitives, fleeing from the battle and pursued by the enemy. One man alone would have news, whether good or bad. Well, was it good or bad?

The watchman saw Cushie, running behind the first runner. 'I see another man!' he cried. 'He is behind the first!' 'Ah!' said the king. 'Another with news.'

Suddenly the watchman recognised the mode and style of the first courier. He shouted excitedly, 'I think the running

of the foremost is like the running of Ahimaaz the son of Zadok.' It seemed that in Israel this marathon runner was well known, even to his style and gait.

Then the king uttered the words which have become immortal. He said, *'He is a good man, and comes with good tidings!'*

How beautiful on the plains,
on the plain of the Jordan,
are the feet of him who brings good tidings,
who publishes peace,
who brings good tidings of good,
who publishes salvation,
who says to Zion, to the royal servant of the Lord,
to the princely David, 'Your God reigns!'

The king knew that Ahimaaz would be a bringer only of good news.

Ahimaaz cried out with a great cry, 'Peace! Peace!' He cried, 'Shalom!' and fell on his face, bowing to the earth, bowing to Yahweh first, and then to his king.

Then came his triumphant cry, filled with awe and reverence, 'Blessed be the Lord your God, who has delivered up the men who raised their hand against my lord the king!'

The news had been brought, the triumph of the tent and the throne had been proclaimed. The Davidic throne was to be forever, and the young Absalom had not defeated the covenant and Messianic promises of Yahweh, LORD of Israel.

The rest did not greatly concern him. King David wanted to know what had happened to Absalom. Evasively the first runner answered, 'When Joab sent your servant, I saw a great tumult, but I do not know what it was.' True his statement or otherwise, it mattered little to Ahimaaz. It was the good news he had wanted to deliver, and this he had done.

The king said, 'Turn aside and stand here.' Ahimaaz turned aside and stood still.

Forever the memory of what happened would remain in his mind. The bad news which the king received from the dark runner, and the great grief of the man who—though king was even more the father. No matter what the son had done, the father loved him dearly, and his words have run down through the centuries, causing a shiver and a thrill of pain to those who hear them.

'And the king was deeply moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, he said, "O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!"'

In that cry of pain he revealed the pain of the Eternal Father, for His lost sons, and the death that His own Son received and endured on another tree, hung until he had received the pain, the pollution and the treachery of the human race into his being and vanquished it. Somewhere in the heavenly watchtower the cry of the heavenly Father was ringing out, whether Ahimaaz heard it or not at the time.

Whatever the pain and poignancy of the moment, Ahimaaz knew the vast delight of the evangelist. He knew the joy and wonder of the running and the proclamation. He was the powerful prototype of the new race, soon to be born, which would take the good news, the news of deliverance of man from his enemies, the glad tidings of salvation.

And it must be said—and let all say it of the evangelists of the true Good News, the Eternal Gospel, as each runs-

'He is a good man, and cometh with good tidings!'

The criminals

I remember the day the Henry brothers came into the Recruiting Depot. I don't know why they called it a Depot, except that thousands of troops were billeted there for training. They constituted a pool of rookies, steadily being shaped into soldiers, and from which the commanding officers of units could come and select their men. It was the Royal Showground of Sydney, and a vast place it was, with pavilions, and show-huts and the like. It had a show-ring, and show-stands, and a number of small huts, 'each holding about sixty men.

We were billeted in the pig pavilion. I think there was more than one pig pavilion, but anyway we were in 'pigs'. The vast place had row upon row of palliasses on wooden duckboards. Not very comfortable, but quite commodious. I remember these two thick-set men—the Henrys—walking with a bit of a swing and swagger down the aisles. They gave me a hard stare and passed on. Some of the men were playing bowls, down the aisles, with hard steamed puddings. As a matter of fact I liked hard steamed pudding, and thought this was like desecration.

A few minutes later two other men came in, and walked down the same aisle. They were the Grady brothers. They

looked as hard and tough as the Henrys. They joined the Henrys. The four of them started quite a racket. It echoed backwards and forwards in the pavilion. They had thrown their issue of new uniforms, boots, belts and slouch hats onto some duckboards. They were complaining. None of us took any notice. New recruits always complained.

I was a sensitive sort of person, just turned twenty-one, and filled with ideals for mankind. Also I had just been given two stripes. I had some sort of authority. In a way I was glad they were not in my section. They were under another corporal, and he wasn't present.

After a time they came up the aisles to see me. They had noticed the stripes on my sleeve.

'We have a complaint, Corporal,' they said. 'We want to be together, and our allotment doesn't let us.'

'See your corporal when he comes back,' I said gently. 'I'm sure he'll make it good.'

'Better,' one of them muttered. 'Better, see?'

I nodded. I had a thing about authority. Anger always boiled quickly when people didn't obey. I really didn't care who it was they didn't obey. I just could not abide rebellion. I've often wondered why. In those days I'd confront a rebel. Now I do what I do in an oblique manner. No direct confrontation. I've learned that.

The Henrys and the Gradys stuck together. They sat together in the mess, played together in the gym, and drank together in the canteen. They puzzled me a bit, but then they didn't figure too largely in my thinking.

Not until they came home the first night they had a pass. They came home drunk, but not wholly blithered. However, they were really nasty. I got on the boil a bit, but being a person who felt sorry for drunks, I never showed it. It was well after 'Lights Out' when they turned up, and they were

supposed to be in before that bugle. They slithered and scraped their way along the pig aisles. I knew they were spoiling for a fight. I kept quiet.

So did their corporal. He was a quiet man, and sensible. He let them settle down, which took quite some time. Finally they went off into heavy snores. Next morning they tried to stay on their palliasses, but the corporal moved them all right, or rather the sergeant did when he called him. The sergeant wasn't worried much about people' like the Henrys and the Gradys. He had a whole army behind him.

They looked a bit sideways at the sergeant, then exchanged looks. They said, with a sneer, 'Nice shark-bait, eh?'

The sergeant didn't like that. Nobody likes to think others are planning to hoist him into the drink to be bait for sharks. So he gave a couple of roars and they slouched out on to the morning parade.

I was the only physical training NCO, and so I had to put a couple of hundred men through their paces. I did it in a strong but objective voice. 'Up, down, in, out, backwards, forwards. Up, down, in, out, backwards, forwards.' The Grady brothers panted away. They were tough looking, but not much wind when it came to PT.

After a time the Gradys and Henrys started the rackets. I'm not too sure what they all were. I was a fresh and fairly innocent young character. I never visited the wet mess. I had a group of friends who were interested in writing and literature. We would sit in a grandstand and chat away. In fact we formed a sort of send-up Snobs' Club. I remember being Prendegast-old-chap, and my closest friend being Chomondoley. There was also Hyphen-Jones, and Featherstone, and High-Bottomley. Names like that. We would talk to each other in plummy Oxford accents. The other Aussie recruits rather liked it. One or two asked shyly and modestly whether they might join. On the whole we were harmless.

Some of us were also men of faith. We were not religious, if it comes to that. We just had a strong faith, and a reasonable sort of ethical standard. We were not pious, nor did we get preachy. The rest of the Snobs' Club accepted our stand. They recognised that we were human beings. Some of them, I suspect, admired our pattern of life. They groaned with the rest under the tensions of unrelenting P.T. sessions.

The Gradys and Henrys, for some reason or other, also left us alone. They got on with their rackets. They led the swy school behind the bull-ring. They were also on to the sale of ration coupons, but especially petrol coupons. They were well into the black market. It was all a bit of a mystery to me. I couldn't see what they would want with that sort of thing when We were in a war, and any day we might go overseas.

Then came the night when one of the Gradys had the D.Ts or, if you will, the *delirium tremens*. I had not seen a case of them before. Once having seen it you never forget, and then you never want to see it again. The person has passed beyond being merely drunk into an alcoholic realm where he goes utterly berserk. What he sees in the attack must be terrifying. All kinds of creatures crawl, leer, and make passes, and even attack. The imagination when normal could not even begin to conjure up the weird and frightening creatures of the D.Ts. So Frank Grady had the D.Ts, and they, were trying to quieten him as they entered the pavilion. A couple of hundred men woke up, some of them complaining. One of the Henry brothers, 'Mo' by name, kicked at one of the complainers. Then the other brothers joined in, all except the brother Frank. He was screeching in the horrors, and the corporals from each section came running. After a time the sergeant came too, out of his special office-bedroom. He started telling Frank Grady to keep quiet.

The Grady-Henry combination told him what to do. They

were not just rude but vicious. The sergeant had one look at them, and knew he was not going to make it. He sent off for the Military Police and the Regimental Medical Officer. By this time the soldier who had complained had been battered into silence. A group of men was gathered around, watching quietly. Frank Grady was in the horrors, rolling and screaming and sobbing. The R.M.O. came, and after a time put a needle into Frank. One wasn't enough. I'm not sure what it was they gave him, but eventually we all had quiet.

The next morning the Grady-Henry bunch came up to the fellow who had complained. He had a bandage on his head. He looked at them sideways. The gang of toughs told the soldier that he had better not complain in future. They would do what they wanted to do, and no one would interfere. The soldier said nothing. After roll-call and breakfast, the Gradys and the Henrys had to front the Commanding Officer. He warned them against a repetition of the event. The gang stood silent, and afterwards moved out without saying a word.

The strange thing was that they would do my P.T. and never complain, never threaten. One night, one of the Gradys came home alone. He was vomiting heavily, and I helped to clean up and put him to bed. The others came in with noise, and no one said anything. The first Grady slept on. Next morning he came up to me. 'Was it you who put me to bed last night?' he asked bluntly. When I nodded, he said 'Oh!' like that, as though surprised, and walked off in his swinging, swaying sort of way.

Night after night hell was let loose. The Grady-Henry bunch had taken over. There was plenty of anger amongst the troops, but they had heard things and so they kept silent. They had heard that the Grady-Henry bunch were famous Sydney criminals and racketeers. If anyone did things he would cop it. There were stories about an officer who had been badly bashed up. He was one of our officers who had

given orders to the members of the gang on parade. They were orders they understood to be insulting. There were threats too, especially at the two-up school.

Maybe you are wondering why I write an account like this, and tell the story of the Grady-Henry gang. It certainly was not a nice story. They were tough as they come. They tyrannised us, and made our training less enjoyable than we had hoped. It seemed they were out of another world. We wondered why they were in the army. They didn't train. They obviously didn't think much about the fighting. They were in it for what they could get out of it.

Then we discovered the reason. Someone who had a brother in the C.I.D. had learned the reason. Things had become hot for the two sets of brothers. The police were on to them, so they joined up. That was generally enough to take the police off their backs, but the brothers were carrying on their criminal actions under cover of the army. No one could catch them or get to them.

It was a crazy thing, watching those four men become rich, watching them dominate a whole pavilion of men, watching them use the army as they wished. They somehow got leave when they wanted it. They came in as late as they desired. They loafed, going to sick-parade and getting what they wanted.

Hyphen-Jones had their number. Not that he was a tough chap, as men go. It was his brother who was in the C.I.D. 'No guts,' he said. 'All wind and bluff and beer-talking.'

Who was going to call the bluff? 'No one,' he said. 'Not while they are like they are—together. They need to be separated.'

How did one separate them? He didn't know. 'It's got to happen,' he said.

I reckoned they might be different when the units got into action. Hyphen-Jones snorted. 'Action!' he said derisively. 'They'll never see action.'

The Commanding Officers were coming now, from all the units. They were selecting men for their battalions, regiments and corps troops. No one ever selected the Henry-Grady brothers. Either our C.O. had warned them off, or the C.Os had simple discernment. New troops came, were trained, and went, and still the gang remained on. Hyphen-Jones knew why. 'They'll stay here until the war's over,' he said. 'They've made this their gang headquarters.'

In a way they had. We all had duckboards, palliasses, and nothing more. The gang had lockers at the side of their beds. They had gear stowed under the duckboards. They had gear under their pillows. No one dared discipline them. They hated authority, and even the suggestion of it would get them into a rage. In rage they were formidable.

Hyphen-Jones kept saying, 'Criminals have no real guts. They are filled with hate. A man filled with hate gets nowhere.'

That was all new to me. I didn't think I would like to take on one of the four brothers, not even if single-handed. Hyphen-Jones was contemptuous. 'I reckon you could easily make it,' he snorted. 'Even though they might have a bit of weight on you.'

The gang of four knew we were men of faith, and for some reason kept clear of us. Maybe it was chronic guilt. I don't know.

It was then that Sergeant Rollings appeared on the scene. He was a strong man, physically, and well-controlled. He seemed to have little regard for the gang-of-four. They first clashed one night when they came in drunk. He was in his little room which he had taken over from the former sergeant. When the noise started he came out, and turned on his torch. He ordered them to be quiet, and stop disturbing others.

They could not believe it. 'You don't know us, eh?' they asked.

He didn't answer that. 'Just get to bed, and quickly,' he insisted. When they went on cheerily with their noise, he warned them again. They ignored this, so he wrote something down. The next morning they were paraded before the C.O. The C.O. was a keen disciplinarian, but he had little support, in the case of the gang, from his N.C.Os. He saw quickly that Rollings would stand for no nonsense.

'Leave stopped for the week-end,' he said. 'Orders are you are to come in quiet at nights.'

Rollings didn't even smile. His jaw was set and so were his lips. Really firm, they were.

The escort let them go outside the orderly room. The four brothers went up to Rollings. 'See if we don't get out,' they said. 'See if we don't get leave.'

Strangely enough they did not get leave. The officers and N.C.Os closed up with Rollings' insistence. So the Gradys and the Henrys got out and went, without leave.

They arrived back Sunday night, full of grog. Rollings was there to meet them. 'Your charge sheet is made out,' he said. 'You'll front the Colonel tomorrow morning.'

That was when they went for Rollings, en masse. Rollings was a trifle surprised, but he singled out Frank Grady. 'You'll be first,' he said. For a moment the other three hung back. Then they saw Frank go down, and rushed. Rollings played them for a while but they closed in on him. Frank Grady was up and into it with them, putting the boot in. A growl rose from the whole pavilion, and shouts came from all over the place. Someone shouted out, 'Gutless skunks!' and Mo shouted out, 'Who said that.? I'll kill him.' There was silence but a corporal raced out to get the M.Ps.

They came in numbers, and the fists started to fly. Finally they had the gang-of-four beaten, and took them off to the clink. The conversation that went on was full of relief. Rollings was on his feet, not much the worse for the battering. After a few words he went into his small room. The pavilion

was soon asleep.

Hyphen-Jones said next day, 'Watch them lose their guts.' He added cynically, 'That's if they ever had any.'

We watched. The next day the Colonel had them sent to Holdsworthy, the remedial camp. They used to be tough at Holdsworthy. They had the gang there for a week and when they came back they were even more defiant. They told Rollings to his face that he was a dead man.

Strangely enough they came back sober. the first night. The second night they were still sober. The third night Frank went into the D.Ts again. Rollings was quick onto this attack. He had the other Grady go for the R.M.O. The R.M.O. had Frank put into the military hospital ward. The other members of the gang hung around the camp that night. It was two days before Frank was out, sobered up and a bit dried out.

The next night the gang went out on the town. We never did hear what happened, but they were brought back by the M.Ps and put into the clink. Next morning they were collecting their gear. The others looked on, silently. Mo let Rollings know his days were ended.

'Just don't go on leave,' he warned him, 'or you're dead meat! You leave this showground and you've had it!'

Rollings looked at him as though he thought that information childish. 'When I want to,' he said, 'I go on leave, and that's that.'

The gang was taken away, this time for a month. Some nights Rollings went on leave. We waited anxiously each night for his return. We were never disappointed. With some apprehension we waited for the return of the gang. We knew they would be boiling mad. We knew there was murder in their hearts. We felt for Rollings, and not much less for ourselves.

Only Hyphen-Jones was sceptical. 'You wait,' he said. 'You're all in for a shock.'

So we were. We could not believe what we saw. The thickset, tough and nuggety sets of brothers were close to unrecognisable. They were marched in, but they had little stomach for that. They were smart enough, but only under duress. When the detail saluted the officer, right-turned, and marched off, the four stood before him, almost bedraggled. The officer read them a lecture. Their reply was abject silence. He nodded and went off after his detail.

There was a strange silence in the vast pavilion. Every eye was on the Gradys and the Henrys. None of them lifted his eyes to look at any one. They shuffled off to their duckboards. It was easy to see they were exhausted. Rollings shot out of his room, and came across to them.

'On your 'feet,' he said sharply. Incredibly they were on their feet, stiff to attention. An escape of breath came across the entire pavilion.

'Stand at ease,' Rollings barked, and they did just that.

Rollings pointed to the lockers. 'I want those out of here, now. Get them back to where they belong.'

The four men looked at him, but no one said anything. Slowly they emptied the lockers and then each picked up his piece of furniture, making his way wearily down the long pig-aisles.

'See what I mean?' Hyphen-Jones hissed.

The men gawked as they passed. The humiliation of the gangsters was complete. When they came back, Rollings had examined their duckboards. 'You will clear out non-army gear. You will tidy your palliasses, and you will await inspection.' He was gone, back into his room.

The four looked at each other. There was a mild movement, but then it stilled. They shrugged their shoulders. They began to tidy the beds.

Next morning they were on parade on time. They moved smartly, even if somewhat mechanically.

The metamorphosis was complete. They did latrine duty

—something they had managed to escape before. They went on emu details—picking up paper and rubbish from the grounds. They came home sober for the most part, and when they weren't they were quiet. They were obviously scared of Rollings. He for his part bore them not the slightest trace of animus. They made him more feared.

Then they were drafted. The next batch of C.Os who arrived, picked them quickly. In fact they were split up. This was the time when the army did that sort of thing—at draft time.

Frank Grady came to me. 'You've got influence with the C.O., haven't you.?' he asked.

I was wary. 'Not really,' I said. 'He just seems to like me, that's all. I don't have any influence.'

'Do you reckon,' he said, looking around to see no one could hear, 'do you reckon that if I joined your Snobs' Club that maybe the Colonel would give me a hearing?'

I couldn't believe what I heard. A Grady or a Henry in our Snobs' Club, and just when it was folding up for lack of clientele! I stared at him. 'I don't reckon it would make a bit of difference,' I said.

He wandered off. When the day came for the drafts to move off, I had to parade the two Gradys and the two Henrys at their request. They came before the Colonel. He had their papers.

He read the papers with a glint in his eyes. 'So you are being boarded out of the army?' he said. 'You want medical examinations?'

They nodded and said that was what they wanted. When Hyphen-Jones heard it, he nodded. 'Just what I thought,' he said. 'They can't take the army.'

'What do you mean?' I asked him. 'They're in the army.' 'You watch,' he said with a knowing look. 'One each will get out, and the others are off to the Middle East, in different units.'

I never discovered how he knew. Perhaps he didn't. But his prophecy was fulfilled. Two of them—a Henry and a Grady—went out with ulcers of the stomach, serious ulcers. The others were swept out of sight. I remember the day the sweeping took place. I have never seen any two men look more miserable, defeated and broken, than those two. Except, perhaps, the other two. They really looked hopeless.

'They're finished, inside the army and out,' Hyphen-Jones said. 'They'll never look anyone in the face again.'

Then they were gone, the four. I've never caught sight of them, nor heard of them, since that day.

'That Holdsworthy,' Hyphen-Jones said, 'nothing can hold out there. They know the weakness of rebels, and they know how to handle them.' 'How?' I said.

The leading member of the Snobs' Club grinned. 'Your perverse rebel is a man' filled with guilt and rage,' he said. 'He's easy for treatment. He breaks before the simple man and the honest man.' He grinned again. 'Come to think of it,' he said, 'the simple man and the honest man never breaks. You just can't get at him.'

That event happened about forty years ago. It only came back into my mind recently when I was writing the biography of an ex-criminal. He had come into a dynamic experience of faith-conversion. He was able to face up to what he had been, and why he had been that way. When we shared the matter, he pointed out that he had never accepted authority. That figured. He opened-up to me the world of criminality. It made me understand criminals a lot more. I guess I would like to go back to the time when the gang-of-four was at the Showground, but then my twenty-one years wouldn't have done much for men like them.

Now I know a little differently. Not that I have waited

until this late stage of life to understand criminals. I've met a number of them over the years, in the army and out of it. My time as prisoner-of-war has also given me a little understanding of what confinement means, and how it can depress the human spirit.

Best of all, I have spent years doing the case study of two famous criminals. In fact, although the material available on their cases is sparse, yet it is sufficient to determine their persons.

The two of them were executed with a third person who was, in fact, innocent. He had made a high religious claim, namely that he was the Son of God. The establishment, for the most part, was furious, let alone embarrassed. We need not go into that. They set about executing him, too.

The criminals acted wholly in character. They not only cursed their captors and their executioners, but they cursed the goody-goody who was being executed with them.

While their hysterical outburst was proceeding, the so-called blasphemer, not reacting to them or to the maddened crucifying mob, turned his strong face to heaven and cried out firmly, 'Father!' When he did that, one criminal paused. The other proceeded with his fluent blasphemy. The first criminal then heard the man between him and his colleague say, 'Forgive them, for they know not what they do!'

I would like to expand, as well as expound, the whole matter to you. It is simple enough, and quite profound. However, I will not do that. The case is simple and obvious. The first criminal understood that the man next to him was in fact talking to God, and that God was His Father, and that the Father understood people, including criminals, and was prepared to forgive them.

Perhaps the most powerful act of repentance took place that day. The first criminal lost every trace of his anger, hatred and rebellion. He acknowledged the rightness of the punishment he was meeting. He confessed that this Christ

was indeed the Son of God, and that he wished that One to remember him when He died. That One said very simply, 'This day you will be with me in a Garden.' He might have said '*the* Garden', but it does not matter.

A criminal, in the last analysis, may lack the courage and strength he often claims to have. Criminality from any point of view is small and mean, no matter how large the returns. A criminal can be broken by punishment, or by working upon his hatred and guilt. Only love can restore a criminal.

It was love that restored this criminal friend of mine. It has restored countless numbers of confessed and practising criminals, down through the centuries. It could have gripped the Gradys and the Henrys if someone had been able to get to them.

I will always think of them going off, segregated, broken in spirit, ulcered in stomach, and with no future. By contrast the man who died with, Christ was bound for a Garden.

Eden, I suppose, or as they say, Paradise.

The unique supply

Not of ourselves, nor from ourselves,
 Nor in the multiplicity of all things—
 Fathers and mothers, wives and husbands,
 Children, friends and society—
 Is the fulfilment we require. We who are human
 Need most of all fulfilment of feeling,
 Emotional fulness, flowing in
 With supply never-ending. Short-sighted,
 We think it is in things about us.

Each thing we demand of,
 Each person we require, each emotion
 Is something we make God, or make an idol
 When we insist incessantly
 That it be our emotional supply, our fulfilment.
 When He forbid idolatry He was not deprivative,
 Not shearing off the best, making us barren,
 Forcing us in hard jealousy to turn to Him.
 He knew that the best was Him
 And only Him, before all other things.

When Christ called out hatred
 Of father and mother, husband and wife,
 He was not wanting our love alone,
 But showing that true love

83 The Unique Supply

Springs from the fountain of God. No man
 Is a fountain within himself.
 The psalmist said, 'My springs are in You.'
 Out of the fountain of life
 Flows all that is life. When we drink
 This is the only true source.
 (All these words and thoughts are true
 Even if commonplace.)

When then we are filled with God,
 When the dew of the sanctuary
 Falls softly upon us, when we drink
 Of the only Supply: then we are filled.
 There is no other way, can also be none.
 Then we too flow out the supply
 That He has designed for others. We become
 The other thing or person—no substitute
 For God, no surrogate Deity—
 The one who supplies the needs—God's messenger—
 Is the person at hand
 Through whom He gives the fulness.

Emotional fulfilment: we need not despise
 Or denigrate this need of man. We are made
 For such fulfilment, both to give and to receive.
 Only idolatry acts as the substitute,
 Yet failing to give causes anger.
 Our anger is with idols, but mainly with God.
 We shake our angry fist at Him, declaim loudly
 That He who created supplies not.
 For His part He knows no oneness with idols, no identification
 With the manufactured symbols of man's mind.
 Of course He gives us nothing through our idols;
 He of Himself is the flowing fountain,
 The Ocean of love, the quietude of peace.

He is the ceaseless Supply
 Of all our needs. This is our rapt joy:
 To live in Him, unceasingly and for ever.

Un-trivial pursuits

He could see it afresh, even as he lay there, thinking. Beside him she slept, unconscious of time and action. Her sleep was that of a rare person, one with a clear mind and a good conscience. It was not that his own mind was not clear: it was. Nor was it that his conscience fluttered restlessly as it had done at other times—times of spasms and tortures. Today it was wholly at peace.

So he lay there, his body at rest, and his memory opening its doors, and letting things flood him from the past. In a way these memories were a river flowing, and as he looked he marvelled at the memories that came tumbling out. Some of them caused him to gasp. He began to think, 'Can one person contain so much? Can a single person have so many things happen to him?'

He knew it to be true. It was part of his assured belief. Man was—and is—a mysterious creature. His imagination compasses worlds and eternities. It lifts itself to heights beyond heights, and crashes into unseen valleys, depths which defy rational description. He, too, was one of these creatures, one of these strange and wonderful personalities which are ever at life, climbing its mountains, conquering its impasses, defying its dangers, and breaking out into the

brilliance of its revelations.

The memory of his fine dreams came to him, those he had dreamed in a prisoner-of-war camp, lying on the bug-ridden bed, looking out into the dappled day where the sun broke through the shade of the rubber trees, and glinted on the smooth pointed leaves. Then it had not seemed to be dreaming, but planning for the new world, and the new life. It had to rise out of the old—the woundings and the hurtings, the cruel and the rapacious, the struggling for breathing in the thick malodorous jungles, the struggles in the slime and the muck to preserve his integrity.

Others had not seen it that way, and even now he wondered at their difference in thinking. He accepted the fact of the differences, for they had been there, all along the way. Man has his variety of thinking, and of acting. He did not fight that, but he felt it was often a betrayal of true being, an adverting to that which was less than it had to be. He shrugged as he lay there, feeling those old evaluations coming to life again.

He remembered the group of them, the men who loved art and literature, who sought to paint and to write. How they would talk! He smiled at the memory of the meetings, the shared drawings and sketches, the readings of the stories. Some of them seemed so unlikely, so little fitted to love of art and of writing, but they had been apt. He remembered their aptness. They had also been evocative—some of them. He himself had been evoked by them into writing as he had not done so before. He had begun to grasp the wide range and variety of expression a person could have, as well as the never-ending themes.

Wistfully he remembered the stories which had been lost — written, and then somehow lost. For a moment he mourned over them as children he had loved, and who had gone elsewhere, before him. It seemed they still lived— somewhere. They had begotten themselves in the womb of

his mind, and having been born had vanished without sorrow.

There was that special story, the story which had always gripped his mind. He had carefully typed it. Somewhere he had obtained clean paper. Previous to this a new typewriter had been given to him on the assurance that he would pay for it when they arrived home. He knew it to be loot from the battle in the city. Later— when they returned home—he had paid for it, so glad to have used it all those years. It had enabled him to write the story.

He remembered the day he had arrived home. One didn't forget that—the return of the first prisoners of war from their field of battle, their lonely and intolerable camps. They were men holding together the fragments of their shattered selves. He was one who had not been shattered—only taught. He had been a disciple of fine minds, sensitive thinking, authentic evaluations. He had not only escaped unharmed, but had gathered fine treasure out of the suffering, the pondering, the evaluations, and stored it up for the coming years.

That day of return was burned indelibly into his memory: it was tears and joy, hectic excitement, and huge elation. Helped sympathetically into ambulances, the ex-prisoners had been driven from the disembarkment wharf at the Quay, into the heart of the city—up George Street in fact—and crowds were missed on the footpaths, spilling out into the roads, the girls jumping into the vehicles hugging and kissing, and love being shown in uninhibited Ways. He remembered all right, but even in the excitement the story was with him in the envelope. He wanted it to be posted, but it had no stamp. Not, perhaps, that that would have mattered.

He had given the addressed manuscript to a sister who said she would stamp it and post it, and she had. A few days later he had seen the banner poster concerning his story. The journal had not written to him, or contacted him by phone

or telegram. They had published the story. No story prior to this one had ever reached their banner posters. This he heard later, but at the time he had sensed it to be something special.

Somewhere he had old copies of the story in its post-war print. The story had been used in an anthology or two, and was in a fine collection of his own published stories. That story had been the first of many more to be accepted.

This morning his memory was not for the publishing, the excitement, the praise, and even the wonder of his old friends. It was for what it had brought forth from the broadcasting network. Within a day of the publication they had sent him a telegram summoning him to an interview. He had rung them, saying that he could not get leave from the hospital. They had made a date and a time, and later he had gone.

It was quite vivid in his memory—that interview. He had liked the efficient and witty man, the features director of the network. He had shown unusual respect, much to his own amazement. What was behind it all? Something of old caution returned, yet the man could get nothing from him that would be of value.

He had been shy in many ways, in those days. So he stammered, unable to comprehend the reason for being summoned.

‘It’s your story,’ the man said. ‘Of course it would have to be. That is a story which will never die.’

Even now he could feel the thrill that went through him. He had stammered even more. ‘You really think so?’ he had asked.

‘Well, of course,’ the director had said. ‘Why else would I call you? Stories like that don’t come often. So we called you.’

He had been quite naive. He had thought they wanted him to write stories. He knew you couldn’t write stories to

order, but he did have other tales, and the man might like those.

No, the features director didn’t want stories at all. He wanted scripts, radio scripts, scripts for serials, writing for life situations. The term ‘soap opera’ hadn’t been in vogue then, but that was what the man meant.

He pondered that. Nothing like this had ever entered his mind. He just loved writing, working out plots, creating characters and watching them work their way with dignity to fulness, through the medium of his writing. They thought their own thoughts, did their own things, acted as they wished, and he followed them, glad to have them in his writing, but a bit awed—and often cowed—by them.

He looked at the radio man. ‘I doubt that I could do that sort of thing,’ he said. ‘I’ve never tried it.’ He felt puzzled.

He knew the director to be competent, trim and efficient, so he took courage when the man smiled. ‘Anyone who can write that kind of story will have no problem with a script,’ he said. ‘Why, you’ll just toss it off. Scripts are easy.’

Just toss it off! He was a bit stunned. That was not the sort of thing he had done. But then, could he do it? Maybe he could.

They talked about scripts, their length, the number of pages, the kind of writing required. Still in doubt, he agreed to attempt the assignment.

Now the director wasn’t simply smiling. He was grinning, hugely. ‘You haven’t asked about salary,’ he was saying. ‘You haven’t thought about it, eh?’

Nor had he. That had been furthest from his mind, but now he was interested.

The director said, ‘We would start you on forty pounds, and we’d expect four scripts a week. Later there could be more scripts and higher payment.’

This had stunned his mind. Looking back over forty years since the incident, he grinned as hugely as the director. The

remuneration was unbelievable in terms of value for those days. That had frightened him a bit, and he had felt uneasy, but the director had caught the trend of his thinking and shaken his head.

‘Don’t worry,’ he had said, ‘you can do it all right.’

He had gone back to the hospital. One part of him glowed: the other was frightened. Thoughts fluttered in his mind. When he shared it with the ward sister, she was delighted. She had read his story. So had most of the patients. Fame had come in a gentle way, but he was wary of fame. He didn’t quite trust that lady. Maybe she was trying to seduce him.

Now, lying on his bed, with the dawn wakening, he chuckled to himself. How naive he had been, and how idealistic! He knew he was still naive—in a way—and that he had kept his ideals, however much he had had to accommodate to life and its demands.

So he had written, there in the hospital. Lying propped up, and with a good hard folder on which to rest his paper, he had written. Gradually the scripts took shape and form. A friend had typed them for him. He felt a bit uneasy about them but sent them off. It seemed to him that he might be demeaning his writing. He wondered what the director would think.

The director had rung him. ‘Good writing,’ he had said, ‘but I want to talk to you.’ They made a time, and he took leave, going to the city.

When they were together, the director smiled warmly. ‘You have the gift all right,’ he said, ‘and there can be no doubt about that, so take heart.’

Then he ceased smiling. ‘They’re too high-flown,’ he said, ‘and far too idealistic. You need to come down to where people are. You need to feel them as they are. Also they will need to be shortened.’

‘Not simple enough?’ he asked, stammering.

‘Simple enough,’ the radio man said, ‘but too introspective. Too involved. Even too thoughtful.’ He sat back, looking at his script writer. ‘People don’t spend hours thinking. Not as you did in the prison camp. No, they just live from moment to moment.’

‘Everyone thinks,’ he protested. ‘They think about everything.’

The radio director’s smile was polite and sympathetic, but he shook his head. ‘Not really. They think much less than we could dream they do.’

For some time they talked on techniques. He remembered his heart had a sinking feeling, something he always felt when he was wrong, or off-key, but mostly when he could not get people to hear what he was saying, or see what he was showing.

As he was going, the features man was warm and kindly. ‘Just keep your mental level to about twelve years of age.’

He thought he hadn’t heard correctly so he said nothing, feeling a bit aghast. After he left he thought he ought to have talked about it.

At the next interview the radio man was even more polite, and somewhat distant. He seemed a trifle impatient, as though his writer-man wasn’t understanding when he ought to.

‘Your mental level is too high,’ he said. ‘Even I couldn’t understand some of what you were saying.’ He smiled thinly. ‘Radio isn’t a pulpit,’ he said, ‘and you aren’t supposed to preach.’ He tapped the desk gently. ‘You’re out of the prison camp,’ he said, ‘and that is all over. People are interested in the life around them.’ -

He smiled more warmly. ‘Now look here. You have an unusual gift for words, for evoking responses, but you must lower the levels. Just imagine you are a child of twelve, and you’re listening—What will you understand? In fact, if you can get it to the mental age of ten, that will be even better.’

The sickening feeling had come back again. Also he felt lonely. Even the features man wasn't interested in what he was writing. A protest was rising within him.

'Do you mean to say,' he said, 'that all radio programmes are geared to the mental age of ten or twelve?'

The radio man nodded. 'Some of the national programmes reach higher. You know, the documentaries, but few listen to them anyway.'

He heard himself saying, 'But if you keep at that level you'll only produce morons.'

The man laughed, but without bitterness. 'We don't have to produce them,' he said. Then he added, 'All radio programmes, daily newspapers, popular journals, and films are geared for the mental ages of ten to twelve years.'

He had to make his protest. 'Look here,' he said, 'if young people go through high school, get their Matriculation or Leaving Certificates, and go out into the world, then they will never hear, read or see anything which will not be years below their intellectual attainment. Having been geared up, they will slow down to this pitch.' He said it with anger, 'This stupid moron's pitch.'

The radio man was smiling, but formally. 'That's how it is—and will be,' he said.

He had gathered up his manuscripts, while the features man was watching him. 'Sorry to have put you to the trouble,' he said. 'You know, the word "prostitution" kept coming up in my mind, all the time I was writing.'

The features director kept his same smile. 'A great pity,' he said. 'You are an outstanding writer. You could make tops, but I doubt whether you'll earn very much. Not if you don't concede something to people's humanity.'

For himself, as a writer, he hadn't thought about earning. He had never thought about that. He had felt relieved when he walked out of the office, even though—to the last—the features man kept asking him to reconsider his decision. He

felt wan and empty as he spilled out into the street, the very street up which the ambulances had driven, where the ticker-tape had floated down from high buildings and where excited cries and screams had filled him with such joy that he had felt he would burst. Now it was mostly silence, and people hurrying here and there, though what for he did not rightly know.

Lying back on his bed now, and thinking about it, he could smile gently. If he had persisted then maybe he could have come through the early stages, written well, and then drawn people along with him. Maybe, even, he could have lifted the levels. Yet as he lay and remembered, he doubted he would have done much. Writing could never have been a game for him, or even a profession.

In his study, on the shelves, the books he had written over four decades stood shoulder to shoulder. They were by no means dwarfed in the midst of other volumes. He had always sought out other thinkers—great thinkers if possible—and had tried to ponder and meditate along with them. How grateful he was that they were not men and women with paltry minds, people who were vain, empty and puerile. They had given themselves to real pursuits, and not just trivial endeavours.

Sometimes he had battled with their incorrect thinking, their failures in discernment, or in deduction. Years under a brilliant polemicist had caused him to think deeply before accepting another's conclusions. There had been times when he had been greatly disliked because he opposed decisions that had not been otherwise questioned. From time to time a boat would rock, or a system be shown to be faulty, and then wrath would come upon him. These times were not easy to shrug off because he was a sensitive person, and he needed to maintain his sensitivity. To lose that would be to

lessen his ability to write properly, and to think sympathetically. He knew the value of sentience.

He had valued the woman who was his wife. Something about her femininity had unerring intuition within it. Often she did not understand what he was saying, but she sensed its rightness, its validity. Likewise she would know if he erred. Sometimes they differed, then a torrid battle would ensue, he fighting for reality, knowing she could be wrong. But he was grateful to her, and to others who had sensed his need of honest support.

Later, when he had begun to write his theology, he had been questioned harshly. It was curious that none of his critics came to him directly and personally. They talked to each other, and perhaps their judgements were correct, but they did not test them out by coming to him. Others were content to admire his thoughtful writing, but they confessed they did not understand it. This had caused him to have misgivings, although whether out of humility or a sense of inferiority he could not rightly decide.

He had gone on writing, but the thought of trivial pursuit was anathema to him. He had a loathing of trivia, of clichés, of wasteful emptiness in writing, art, or conversation. On the one hand fame beckoned him on, and on the other criticism seemed always about to destroy him. He feared fame, and dreaded criticism. Yet he knew dread of criticism was immature, emotional desire for praise, and that praise from men could threaten reality in communication. He would come out of moods where he had been disheartened, only to hear of a person who had been greatly helped by something he had written, or said. He knew the dangers in seeking fame, and the bitterness which could easily breed from criticism. So he tried to walk between the two, finding it perilous but necessary.

In the early days he had taken criticism seriously. 'Too high-flown,' they would say, when he knew his levels were

just human, and that he did not belong to the elite. There was nothing esoteric in what he said. To him it was all very clear. He sought to say it more simply than he had done in the past. He even conceded to himself that a child of ten or twelve *should* be able to understand what he was saying, but he refused to entertain readers at such a level. He knew the difference between 'childlike' and 'childish'. He had no time for the latter.

He saw clearly the snobbery that can spring from the getting of knowledge. To refuse the trivial and the empty might also mean that he was proud of his depth of thinking, and that this brought with it an elitist snobbery. He knew this did not necessarily have to be. One could sit lightly to attainment and ability, meanwhile enjoying the treasures that grew out of the pursuit of reality.

Another matter would come to him—that of entertainment. He was often accused of being 'heavy' or 'complicated', and lacking a sense of enjoyment, yet he had spent most of his life enjoying things. He liked to be entertained, and to entertain. It was the *quality* of entertainment that concerned him. He saw no great point in bawdiness, in cruelty at the expense of others, or in ridicule of genuine greatness. He saw point in great affections, the vital conflicts of the mind and its loyalties, the titanic play of the emotions and the passions, as also the greatness that lay in the interaction of men and women, of nations and their armies. He was eager to listen to the insights of great minds, and to see the passions of great hearts. This he rated as high entertainment, and he could be deeply moved by it. He avoided triteness on the one hand and misplaced messianism and utopianism on the other.

Honesty had forced him to see that many times he must have been wrong. He also came to realise that many factors which were not good had pressured him to succeed, and he had given in to such pressure. One of these elements was the urge to justify himself as a person, to prove his worth and

integrity to others. Slowly he realised that this very endeavour negated, if not destroyed, his true integrity. Time and again his mind would go back to the meeting of those simple—yet profound—men, in the prison camp. It would also revisit those who were childlike, and who lived in a calm simplicity that he sought to emulate. He saw, too, that if 'Fame is the spur', then fame could be a most treacherous and deadly mistress.

He had had his periods of near bitterness, if not bitterness itself, and these came from the non-acceptance of others— real or imagined. In these times he had consoled himself with the thought of posthumous acceptance. Then he discerned this trick in his thinking. It might be true eventually—even generations later—that the value of his thought and writing might be recognised, but that was to be no spur to him in the present. It must be 'truth for truth's sake', if that could be rightly understood and effected, and if that was what he was really about. Let posterity go hang; it had its profound treasures, the sum total of recorded human thinking, the endless accomplishments of its writers, thinkers, teachers, artists and musicians. They were enough without future generations digging up some almost forgotten, and unrecognised, proclaimer.

Through that he had learned integrity. He was to read, to think, to study, to write and to teach as the truth came to him. He never even questioned the word 'truth' for he knew it, and knew he knew it. Yet he did question his grip of it, his practice of it, and certainly his communication of it. He would mourn over clumsy sentences, poor constructions, and even recognise artifices he had used in early days to impress his readers and listeners, things which would draw them to him rather than to the truth he sought to proclaim. He began culling out these grits, smoothing down the words and sentences until they achieved their own beauty and he could leave them with it.

It was well after middle age that he began to wake, night after night, sometimes late in the evenings, sometimes early in the mornings, and think on his failures, his awkwardnesses, and even the self-deceits which had gone near to corrupting him. So far as he knew, none of these had been conscious or deliberate. But they had been there—without doubt. Memory had temporarily covered them over. He had thus come to see how complex a person can make himself, but with increasing joy he also realised how simple, too, a person can become. 'Simplicity is an art,' he had once thought, and the idea had stuck with him. Night after night he would wrestle with the issues until something came very clearly to him. It was the thought of a great man who had said, 'Not having a righteousness which is my own'.

The meaning of this saying came home to him with startling clarity. He saw the inner deceit of imagined self-righteousness, and man's compulsive endeavour to build such a system of imagined reality. He saw too the utter freedom of relinquishing these endeavours, resting in the grace which gave him its own authentic righteousness. Not to have to have a righteousness was richly liberating. To see the danger of seeking to effect one was a welcome defence against doing so. Yet he never saw grace as a cover-up for wrong and failure. Rather, it showed him the generosity of God in setting him free from iron-clad guilts which could hold the spirit in terrible bondage. He saw the joy that man can have when the conscience is truly free, especially in the sheer objectivity of great grace.

That was when he had begun to read his great mentors with new sight, and indeed new insights. He was rival to no man, and not touched even by the thought of fame. He saw the great men were simple. Perhaps, then, he had been wrong to reject script-writing all those years ago. Then he knew he had not been wrong. That sort of writing and thinking to which he had been tempted was trite, something to stir

the emotions, something to entertain at the shallowest of levels, and to titillate jaded palates and bored minds. He would have no part in that. He still read much of many minds, the fruits of people who were doing fresh research, and making inroads into new areas, but often he had the sense that they were saying nothing new. They were bland without seeming to be.

Once it had come as a shock to him that many scholars were interested in becoming noted and famous, and in gaining awards. He saw they had the problem of proving themselves by their attainments, and that the very striving to do so could destroy the integrity of their research. They were compulsive in their endeavour to get recognition. They needed to be famous. Where they failed they often became cynical, and some even bitter. Others just retired to convenient ivory castles of their own making. Those who seemingly succeeded in attaining recognition often compounded their own compulsions for credits. There could never be an end to it, except, perhaps, dull 'dusty death'.

He watched the trend, and concluded that it must have always been there. He saw people scramble up over others, treading down their rivals, and even those who had had no rivalry. When he read their works he saw the death in them. in spite of the bright promises of life. As he grew older the trickery of it came to him more quickly, and he was disappointed. Also he was constantly warned for his own case, alerted to the same drives within himself. Men could destroy each other, could write harmful graffiti on another's person, and even vandalise it with words. He began to understand the terrible striving for recognition and fame, and more clearly saw its transitory nature and its dreadful deceit.

Each time he would be driven back to the nature and integrity of God. So many things appeared contrary to this conclusion of his—that God was true—that many of his

friends and enemies thought him naive. They saw him as retreating into theology, whereas they—for their part—were out in the vast prairies of genuine human thinking, research and endeavour. They despised his retreat into religion, but he knew, himself, that it was not that. He knew the difference between 'religion' and 'faith'. Religion was man's endeavour to rationalise his universe with the presence of a deity (or deities). Faith was the experience of reality based on, and springing from, prior grace.

He knew that those who differed from him dared not—for the most part—face the reality of God, for in the ultimate this confrontation by the Living One would out-countenance them. Human shame is a deep and painful thing. He knew how terrible is pride, and yet how beautiful and liberating is humility. They who become little children grow richly profound.

As he lay there he felt a genuine tranquillity spread through him. No one could put him on to succeed, and God certainly would not. Yet his very liberty not to succeed laid on him the obligation to maintain integrity. He had no quarrel with this, because behind obligation lay that great power which he was pleased to interpret as 'constraint', and constraint was irresistible. Its motion was gentle, but its force could not be opposed. The constraint was not something he worked up, or even brought upon himself. Its power lay outside of him., though wholly upon him. This he could never explain to a person who lacked it.

Soon his wife would awake, and he would prepare breakfast for her. She would smile knowingly upon him and his latest mental quest. He would gladly bring her the breakfast, and all the time his mind would be working on his next writing exercise. He thought of writing a Foreword to his next book, calling it 'Non-Trivial Pursuits', in the hope that some reader would recognise triviality for what it is worth—or not worth!

Then he thought, 'No, better to call it 'Un-Trivial Pursuits', for here the idea was that you could undo a trivial approach to life and to truth, and start afresh. In a sense that was what he was always doing: always making a fresh approach to what he already knew, so that he was according it its true significance. He found himself wishing that human beings would break through the barriers of their own deliberate triviality, into the richness of genuine human destiny.

He saw himself pick up the manuscripts from the table of the radio director of features, and walk away from that sort of thing, and on the whole he was not displeased. One had to keep doing this sort of thing, especially when one was under the Constraint. So far as he knew, just about everything came out of that Constraint.

I saw, in the night, visions



I saw that this man had slept in quiet joy and gentle serenity, yet when he wakened there was an insistent darkness about him. It was not the darkness of the night--for although that was there it did not terrify him. This other darkness lay within the darkness of the night, and it set out to defy him and to accuse him as though he were its special object of attack. It was as though it would deny him sleep and set his thoughts on a continuous defence of his conscience.

I realised that this man was somewhat accomplished in spiritual warfare, and that for many years he had fought the devices of evil. This time he did not underestimate the power of accusation, for he knew that in every man there has been a past of sin and failure, and that this had no less been in him. However, he was versed in the medicine of the Cross which had healed him of his own sin and evil and set him free.

As he lay in that darkness, a strong resolve grew in him. I heard him say, 'I will think only of him who rides upon the white horse.' In his mind's eye he saw that white horse, and he cried, 'He who sits upon this horse is called Faithful and True, for that is what and who he is!' He cried also, 'This is

the one clad in a robe dipped in blood, and the name by which he is called is The Word of God.' The one who had cried knew that blood to be of great power, for it had been shed on Calvary's Cross, and it had also been the blood of the wrath of God.

He said to himself, 'I will be in the hands and the arms and the authority of this Great One. I will think upon him, and I will go forth with him who himself goes forth to conquer.' He then saw with great joy and strong confidence that a great and shining sword went forth from the mouth of him who was seated upon the horse, and to his amazement he saw this sword leave no nation unscathed, for with it his Lord conquered all the nations.

I saw in my vision that the powers of darkness relinquished their tenuous hold of the man in the night, and he slept in the power of his Lord.

Then within that vision I saw the man himself being and living within a vision.

He was walking a road, and at the end of the road he would have to use this sword that ever issued from his Lord's mouth. He walked calmly enough, and, his mind was set upon the marvel that men and women do not easily and gladly hear and know such a word which in itself constitutes the use of the Lord's sword. I saw that as he contemplated he was quiet and harmless, doing nothing to anyone. I knew that he was a man of a sound mind, but I also saw that he was at that moment unthinking and so unwary of things that might happen to him, and I feared a little lest he was too mindful in regard to what could be personal danger.

It was then that I saw a black insect, like a wiry ant or a thin spider, and as he passed it showed an intense dislike of him. He was surprised for he had no feeling for it. He had passed creatures in his travels and rarely even noticed them. This one, however, had hidden powers. It jumped at him, and I saw that as it jumped it grew in size. The man also was

surprised, and he hit at it with his feet, with the shoes upon his feet. For a moment the thing retreated, springing back, and the man passed on.

The creature seemed to be enraged that it should be attacked, even though it had been the attacker. It suddenly enlarged greatly and made jumping leaps after the man, who hastened a little to be away from it. Then it jumped at him, from behind. He turned and lashed at it with his legs and feet, and he ground it under his shoes. Suddenly the creature changed shape and colour. It now became an angry red, and at centre formed itself like a crab, and out of that centre came innumerable arms. They were long, jointed, able to act as so many whiplashes, and their colour was a gleaming and cruel light crimson. These were fearsome to behold—these waving, whipping, jointed masses of arms or legs (whatever they were)—for they were many toils, and they suddenly extended, and appeared to contain poisonous stings in their extremities.

The man knew no fear but he did have caution. stamped upon the creature time and again which was now enraged beyond measure and expressed itself with fury and venom. I saw in the vision that this thing with its ever-increasing tentacles held within it a fearsome and terrible rage. I marvelled that such rage could exist.

When the man stamped on it, it divided, and became two such terrible creatures. The man withdrew from stamping, and made a decision not to destroy it because of the danger of multiplying it even further. I was astonished that he could walk on his way, and the creature—or creatures—did not, at this point, pursue him. I sensed, however, that the creature had future plans to destroy the man whom it had attacked.

I saw that as the man travelled he was most thoughtful. His mind was occupied with the venomous creature and its surprise attack. Indeed, so occupied was his mind that when he arrived at the place of the proclamation that he was to

make, the word had faded from his mind, and he had to about thinking what he would say. I knew that in the depths he dreaded such situations, for why should he come without a sure word gripping him in every part of his being? He could by no means manufacture his announcement: he must not compile it from materials he had gathered over the years. He must have a clear word or he would have no word at all. It would be like leaving the sword in its scabbard and making passes in the air, conjuring up the appearance of a sword, and so satisfying his audience that he had successfully wielded such a weapon.

His links with his friends were thus very vague, and out of character with times before when he had proclaimed the given word. It was not that he wanted this state of mind, for indeed he wished them to fortify him for the significant occasion which lay ahead of him, and for which they were making suitable preparations.

It was then a thought came into his mind, a word he had read with the book he always used. It said, 'There was power' with the Lord to heal.' That startled his mind: it brought him to a new soundness. He saw his Lord filled with power to heal, and he said, 'He always has power to heal. His word is always strong. Since I have no other word than his word, then I can have no other power than his power.' Suddenly he remembered the word he was to proclaim. At once he knew the power had returned, and it was as though the former days of great assurance were with him.

He smiled and he said, 'This word is not my word. It is his word, the word of my Lord.' His spirit rose joyfully within him, and he again felt as he had been when asleep in the night, going into serenity because joined to the Man on the white horse. As he thought of that, then revelation came to him. He shouted in his mind, 'My enemy came against me to destroy me. He hated me. What venom he had! Yet his anger was out of his control. He was just demented evil. I

fought him on his own grounds, blow for blow, and there I was strong, but I was wrong. It should not have been my feet but my mouth which ought to have destroyed him. I have no power in my feet, nor for that matter do I have a mouth that is powerful; but the sword of the Lord—that issues from his mouth and so from mine—is the power to destroy him. "One little word shall fell him." '

The man marvelled in himself at the cunning of the venomous creature. Although consumed with anger and hatred, the creature had been cunningly clever, for he had forced the word of power from the mind of the Lord's servant, and seeing he had done this he was content enough to let the man go upon his way. Had the man thought truly and wisely at the time of the creature's onslaught, he would have used the sword and hacked the creature to pieces, for all the ability it appeared to possess to change its forms and multiply itself.

Not only did the man marvel, for I who viewed the event also marvelled. I marvelled that I had been given such a vision, for without doubt that man in the night was no less myself than himself, and all of us who are called upon to proclaim the truth, and to wield the sword of the Lord. With that Man on the white horse is a great army clothed in fine linen, and in its pristine purity it goes forth to rid creation—in both heaven and earth—of the evil that has come, and to attack it in its various forms and to rid the universe of its very presence.

So I praise this Man on the white horse, that he reveals the lie of evil, uncovers its venomous nature, unmask its fearsome forms and shows it for what it is—a horrible form without substance, a shape without power, a massive falsity doomed to destruction. Through him we are aware that it is not yet dissolved from the face of the earth, and seeks to destroy what it can while it may.

I expect, then, that many a night will have its hours of accusation to the spirits of the true people of the Lord, and

many creatures will leap upon the users of the word of the Lord, but let us know the power of a sound mind, and not be unaware of evil's devices. Let us know that there is always power with him, and that the joy of the Lord is our strength.

Today I leap over mountains

Today I leap over mountains.
 These mountains were created high,
 For me to leap above. Leaping is my function,
 High flying is my destiny, sober lordship my vocation,
 Freedom is my life-force,
 The blood that courses' in my veins.

I was not made for morbidity,
 For lugubrious contemplation,
 For navel-watching and deadly introspection,
 Not made for lethal self-examination
 But for the living reality,
 The possession of the entire creation.

Possessing nothing I possess all,
 Creating nothing I am the true procreator,
 Commanding nothing I have the true authority.
 For I am man, made in the image of God.
 Within his dimensions I am the free Than,
 The true man. I am man!

Today I leap over mountains,
 Compass seas, investigate jungles,
 Move freely in the tribes of man,

Am served by angels, by powers.
I am subject to the true God,
Living in my freedom as man.

The secret is the True Man,
The Liberator who forced open
The doors of human captivity, killed—conquering—
The dominating hosts of evil,
Returning to the exploited their ancient gifts,
Renewing in them the true primeval.

Today I leap over mountains,
I gather the returned grandeur of myself,
I am one with the Liberator and the Father
Who restored the original sonship,
With the plus of continuing grace.
This is how and this is why I leap over mountains.

Come! Come with me,
Come and leap over mountains,
Compass seas, visit the tribes of men
In jungle and on plains and in the cities.
Come, children of the King, and rule wisely
In the new, the true Kingdom.

Chain-breaker



Hickey was the long skinny one. By comparison with the others he was long, but in fact he was about average for a lad of his age. He wore the tight trousers that gripped his ankles and thighs. Not all of them wore the same. To look at they were a nondescript lot. The only well-dressed one was 'Briney'. His real name was Brian, but they had changed it to Briney. The other—calling him Brian—was a bit lah-de-dah. So they had their various names shortened, twisted, changed. Bill Towers was just 'Bill', but Anthony Lord was 'Tony', Batty Jenkins was 'Bazza', and so on.

They leaned against the fence of the old rectory, waiting for the young curate. One or two sat on the bitumen pavement, and a couple of them drifted across the road to the Burr and Cockle. It was an old pub, made of solid sand-stone, and bearing the colonial shape and architecture very well. A few recent changes had given it a touch of awkward modernity, but the patrons didn't mind that. They had a certain pride in the old building. Had class it did, and the neon signs, and the bit of paint, and a new door or two, was nothing against its history.

The boys knew the place well. Not all of them had fathers that they knew, but those who did understood that the Burr

and Cockle was the social centre of their area. The curate was careful not to call it a slum. He just gave it its local name: the Point. When speaking of it to others—his friends in the suburbs—he would call it ‘our underprivileged area’. He had more than a mere affection for it. He loved it. He searched in vain for a home that wasn’t broken or fractured, but that made no difference. He loved it.

They were waiting for him now. He lived alone in the rectory. Whilst he was known as the curate, there wasn’t a rector. At least there was a titular rector, and he lived in the suburbs. His rectorial office was honorary. He was a kind of ecclesiastical father, intended to help the younger man, but somehow he was never needed. The young man was tall and broad, single and enthusiastic, and highly practical about his boys. Also he had been in the army, and a war. He said nothing about it but it gave him a special maturity.

There were girls too, but they came under the province of the deaconess. She was a good sort, gentle but spotty, and she had a following. So the curate didn’t have to worry about the girls, and he seemed glad it was this way. Once a month they all met for fellowship on a Friday night, and played games together. The curate looked after his boys, and the deaconess kept an eye on her girls, and made sure the boys kept their distance. It was all done in a happy, hearty way of course, but the boys were biding their time. So were the girls. Very soon they would all be serious about the matter, and were keen to know how their leaders would act. Even the curate was trying to decide how to act. With the deaconess, of course. At the moment he called her ‘Sister Tina’, but then that was only when the boys and girls were around.

The boys never quite decided about ‘Thingo’. That is what they called the curate. They would jerk a thumb into the air, upwards and backwards, and say, ‘What do you reckon about Thingo?’ They would chatter about him, and

someone would say, ‘He’s taking us for a patsy. He’s going to get us religious.’

Others would shake their heads and say, ‘No. He’s a good guy. He just wants to do us good.’

Nobody wanted to do them good. Except maybe one of the mums, here and there. The Burr and Cockle or other pubs swallowed their male parents every night. The beer talked and there were marital arguments and fights. Some of the mums worked, down at the Maritime Board or in a pub, or in some of the city shops. They did cleaning and the like. There was enough money for living, but what with the pubs, and the gee-gees, a bit of swy here and there, and sudden extravagances, there was little to show for it. Briney was fat and happy. The others ranged from looking starved to a certain well-being. It just depended on the home situation. And now they were going off on their first great adventure in life. Thingo was coming to take them off on this special adventure.

That was why they were uneasy. As the hot early-morning sun beat down on them and the heat began to rise from the pavement, they lounged in a disturbed way. They were restless. Hickey took a cigarette from a packet and began to smoke. He offered them to others. Jacko, his close mate, took one but the others shook their heads in refusal. They weren’t very interested. Later they would come to cigarettes, and then the beer and the S.P. betting, but now they were young, and they liked it this way. They hated the things their fathers did, but they knew with a fatalistic certainty that they were all bound to end up the same way. No one had not finished up in the same way. They let Hickey and Jacko continue their smoking. They itched about the pavement and the rectory steps, waiting for Thingo.

When Thingo came he was dressed in grey slacks, a loose shirt and sandshoes. He had a heavy pack, and strapped across it was a fishing rod, and a .22 rifle. The boys looked

at these with interest. They did plenty of wharf fishing. They said immediately, 'Are we gonna fish?'

'That's right,' the curate said brightly. 'We're going to fish.' They wanted to spread out, rushing home to gel their lines. 'Hold it,' he said, 'hand-lines won't be much good. It's river fishing. You had better just bring rods, those who have them.'

Jacko had a rod, and Briney, and Muggsey Turner, so they were allowed to get them. No one lived far from the other in this pocket handkerchief inner-city area. In no time they were back, and they all began talking about the strength of their nylon lines, or the hooks, or the kind of reels they owned, and the conversation helped to cover their fear.

Colin Wakeman, the curate, could sense their uneasiness. He also knew the reason for it. Few of the boys had ever ventured beyond their birthplace. One or two had visited relatives in the suburbs, but they had been glad to get back. They had talked about the absolute loneliness that people know in the suburbs. Hickey told his wondering audience that places there were not built together. 'Each is on a separate block of land. You just don't see your neighbour. You can't even hear their radios. They all keep to themselves.'

The boys had been wide-eyed at that, and horrified. Hickey had laid it on a bit thick. 'At night-time anything could happen. You could just get murdered and nobody would know.' There were murders in their own area, but they didn't think about that. It was rarely a local inhabitant who was murdered. Broken people stick close together. It was generally a foreigner, or some chance sailor, wandering on his own. Everyone kept silent about a local murder.

The curate rallied them all heartily. 'Next tram,' he announced briskly. 'Round to Wynyard, and off to Central. Then we get the steam train to the country.'

The thing they feared was now on. Their fear nevertheless was mingled with a curious feeling of excitement. They were

breaking age-old tradition, and moving out to where they had rarely, if ever, been. They had not expected their parents would agree, but their parents had let them go. Some had been reluctant, thinking the idea was foolish and new-fangled. Others saw benefit in it. Some had come from the country and were glad their boys would see it. Some just didn't care. It got the boys out of their hair, so they let them go.

They heard the clanging of the tram as it rounded the corner, and there was a rush for the old wood-and-steel bouncer. They clambered aboard, throwing in their small haversacks and their bundles of clothes, wrapped in newspaper or brown paper. Some of them had bottles of drink. They all had lunches wrapped in greaseproof paper and tied with string. The conductor came and collected their fares, taking the heavy pennies. They rattled up George Street in the bone-shaker and were disgorged at the mouth of the underground cave. They shuffled or skipped past the Doughnut Centre, the fruit display and the cake-shops. They crowded around the chocolate machine whilst the curate counted heads, took their money and bought tickets. They were cashed up, and so they felt confident and happy. They knew Wynyard, so as yet the terror of strange places was not upon them. There was only a thin line of apprehension-

At Central they piled out, and rushed mob-like across to the steam platforms. The train that was to take them south was waiting. Its black engine was hissing and panting like a huge, barely-restrained monster. They sidled away from it, fearful lest it might explode or blow up in their faces. They ran along the platform until they found an empty carriage. When they saw it was marked 'Second Class' they embarked, racing each other down the aisle to get window seats. There was a clatter of noise as they turned over the seats so they could face south. Some had to face north, but they soon accepted that, piling their things onto the luggage racks. The

curate made sure they filled all the seats in the forward section. Then he sat with one group in a six-seater arrangement. His heavy pack was also in the luggage rack.

The boys sat back and unwrapped their chocolates. They chewed nervously on them, waiting for the train to go. With a sudden shriek, and a slight rattling of carriages, it was off. It chuffed and panted heavily, and strained away in its black loins until it had drawn its heavy burden out of Central and was on its jumpy way south, hastening the boys through the outer suburbs and getting them out into the country.

It was the country which both fascinated and appalled the gang of boys. Colin Wakeman watched his young charges wilt and diminish under the impact. He saw the fear in their eyes, and the nervousness in their hands. It puzzled him. He knew their fear of other places and of open spaces, and even of public places, but it all seemed strange to him. He knew he ought to understand it. They lived in terraced houses, the loneliest of which was the last, for it had neighbours only on one side. Also most of them lived in houses that had three floors, and one family lived on each floor. What amazed him was the fact that they liked it that way. He felt a slight pity for them, but kept thinking of what was ahead for them when they arrived at their destination. In fact that sent a thrill of anticipation through him.

They were chattering now, encouraging one another. Some of them had their comics and they were concentrating on the amazing adventures of Disney characters. Sometimes they squabbled as they exchanged comics. They never seemed to finish their supplies of chocolate, liquorice and chewing gum. He lay back and thought about them.

He remembered how he had made his first contact with them. He had arranged a tea. Old Mrs Grounds had given him the idea. She had cooked for him, with some of the other old ladies of the Mothers' Union. He smiled faintly. Grandmothers' Union more likely! Still he felt a tenderness

for them. They were good old scouts, even if they were battle-axes in their own rights. He smiled again. They had had those tables and trestles groaning with good food. He and the deaconess had gone out into the streets, up to the small park above the church where the kids were playing. They had been younger then, and tough as they were they lacked a certain guile. So they had responded. They had come rushing in, shouting noisily, and then they had seen the spread, the incredible feast of sausage rolls, hot dogs, cakes, and white bread with butter and hundreds-and-thousands upon it. They had seen the glass jugs filled with coloured cordials, and they had fallen silent.

'What's the line?' Hickey had asked.

'No line,' he had said gently. 'We want you kids to enjoy yourselves.'

They had enjoyed themselves, but warily, cautiously. They were waiting for the catch. Yet, it seemed, there was no catch. Just like that! There was no catch.

Perhaps there had been, he thought. They wanted to tell them the good things of the faith, of course. But then they had not imposed them on the children, waiting for them to respond. Never had they violated their dignity or their personhood. He thought a lot about that, as he lay back, oblivious now to the chattering, the shiacking, and the thumping that was happening. He kept thinking, too, of the deaconess and her brown eyes and her soft, silky, fair hair. Out of deaconess uniform she was another person. Moreover she loved the work, and the area, and the children. He sighed. After a time he slept.

When he woke, the boys were in ecstasies. 'Rabbits!' they were shouting. 'Never seen rabbits like them.'

He looked out. How would they see rabbits? There were no rabbits. 'Show me the rabbits,' he said.

They pointed them out excitedly. They were not rabbits, but sheep. He looked at the boys suspiciously, but their eyes

were clear. 'You mean those sheep?'' he asked.

They slumped. 'Sheep?' they said, and he knew they had not been pulling his leg.

'And those are cows,' he said.

They nodded. 'We guessed that,' they said.

They had stopped reading comics, and were looking at everything. The train rattled on, bringing them to Berry. When they tumbled out on to the platform, they were in a world they had never known. It was so open, so green, so untenanted by houses. Wakeman suddenly realised they had known only one form of architecture, that of their small community. It was a backwater of nineteenth century culture, in spite of the advances in technology. He marvelled at these boys.

In the town they were suspicious. The curate was watching out for Tim Leaney, his farmer friend from the hills at the southern end of Kangaroo Valley. He hadn't showed up, so they went on a tour of the town. The boys crowded together. They had seen too many Western films. They expected holsters, ten-gallon hats and pistols. Whilst it was true that a few were wearing Stetsons, and one or two wore spurs, yet the local farmers mainly drove utilities. Not even a horse was in sight. The young curate grinned when he saw them handling their pen-knives, and talking about how they would show the local hicks a thing or two. In one sense it was bluff, but in another he realised that they were serious. They were afraid.

Tim Leahey turned up with his cattle-truck. It was clean, and the boys clambered up and in with their haversacks and blankets and bundles of clothes. 'The curate had ordered rations through Leahey, and in a few minutes they were off, rumbling towards the high hills.

The hills were another terror for the boys. They shuddered

back from the truck where its apron hung over the edge of the road, and they had looked into a drop below of some hundreds of feet. Wakeman knew they were longing to be back home, but then also they wanted to be here. They wanted to pile up adventure so that they could go home and share it. Tim Leahey provided all the thrills they needed. He knew what he was doing when he drove along the very edge. He had a grin on his face which was no less than wicked. Finally they were on the ridge, above the valley where the boys were to camp.

They peered below to where the curate pointed. Almost covered by she-oaks and casuarinas was a hut. That was where they were to camp.

Wakeman had no idea what lay in store, or he would never have entered that fateful valley.

There was no difficulty getting to the hut. They only had to make their way down through the grassed paddocks. Yet for the boys this was a hazard. They had never walked down a hill—not, anyway, a grassed hill. That was simple enough, but there were cows in the paddock, and a bull also. The bull was a well-fed Illawarra Shorthorn, thick on the neck, heavy shoulders, and tapering to a fine rump. He scarcely looked up as the group crept past him. Wakeman grinned at their caution. The cows, if anything, were more interested, but on the whole they were calm enough. So the group reached the hut without mishap. The hut was on a beautifully grassed flat, and outside the paddock. There were no cow droppings for them to evade as they had had to do on the way down. The hut inside was not spacious but large enough to accommodate them. Tim Leaney had built a fireplace for them out in the open, and there was water in a tank which caught the rain from the corrugated iron roof. In front of them, about twenty yards away, was a beautiful

running stream. Where they were, it was about thirty yards wide, and quite clear. Colin Wakeman itched to use his fishing rod.

They were hungry and began to eat their lunch under the casuarinas. Hickey superintended the making of tea. They had milk from a tin, and sugar from a packet. After lunch they set out their bedding, made out of chaff bags filled with straw. Colin had to use two chaff bags to take his length, but one bag was enough for any boy. When they had done this the boys settled back with their comics. Some of them slept, weary from all the new things.

Late in the afternoon Wakeman suggested they go for a hike. There was a concerted howl of dismay from them all. Behind their excuses the curate detected genuine fear, and he was slightly troubled. He tried to convince them there was nothing to worry about. Hickey was sensitive to the implied criticism. No boy from their locality was ever afraid. He told Wakeman that fact.

'Now look here, minister,' he said, 'none of us is scared. Get that straight. None of the kids from the Point is scared.' He flicked out his knife, opened the blade, and held it up wards. 'Anyone who comes here gets this, quick smart.'

Wakeman smiled coolly, and deflected the fear. 'Just thought we might shoot a rabbit,' he said, reaching for his .22 rifle.

'Ah,' they said together, their eyes gleaming, their jaws dropping, 'now that's different.'

He had not been in the Valley for years and was amazed at how high the undergrowth was. It was compounded of high grass, small shrubs, and shoulder-high bracken. It was lush, and no one had beaten a path through it. They had to cut their way through with a slasher Tim Leahey had left with them. Colin was a bit surprised that they did not rush ahead,

but they kept behind him, pressing up against him. Remembering their sensitivity he made no comment.

Finally they came to where the rabbits were. Wakeman motioned them into silence. They crouched with him, peering through the grass and bracken. Three rabbits were playing around on a hillock. He took aim and fired. The three rabbits scuttled off at the sound, but then one leapt into the air, bucked, and rolled over. Wakeman rushed out and grabbed the twitching animal. He held its back legs in his left hand, took the head in the right hand, behind the ears, and gave a quick pull. The twitching stopped.

'Holy Moses!' one of the boys said. Some of them looked perturbed, even frightened. The curate wondered at them. then he borrowed Hickey's knife and made a slit down the belly, and up through the thorax. He gave a couple of deft twists with the hands, and in a moment the skinning was over.

'Took his clothes off,' Briney said, with heavy humour. No one laughed outright, but some giggled. Wakeman could feel their nervousness.

They stuck closer than ever. Once he turned and said, 'There's nothing to be afraid of. There are no wild animals here, or anywhere, for that matter.'

Hickey said, 'What about foxes and dingoes?.'

Wakeman grinned. 'Foxes don't hurt people,' he said. 'And there aren't any dingoes this side of the Range.'

That did not satisfy the boys. Wakeman compromised. 'We'll get another rabbit,' he said, 'and we'll go home.'

They made their way cautiously through the undergrowth until they spotted a small group of rabbits. Wakeman aimed quickly and brought one down. The boys watched again, fascinated at the quick skinning and disembowelling.

It was getting cold when they returned. They set the fire going, and the curate began making a stew. They peeled and chopped vegetables. He had had the rabbits boiling in the

pot with some spices and herbs, and they poured in the chopped vegetables and added two kinds of sauces. After a time it began to smell good. The man suggested they wash some potatoes ready for putting in the ashes, so they did that at the stream. He lit a petrol lamp, and they sat beneath it, under the casuarinas. A breeze sprang up along the stream, and made a faint sighing in the trees. Some of the boys shivered and drew closer to the fire.

Somewhere a bull roared. He was giving great belly-cries, roars of anger and desire. The boys looked at one another. Curlews were crying into the late afternoon, and currawongs were giving their last melancholy melodies before they settled.

Something was wrong: Wakeman knew that. He felt the chill of the evening penetrating his own flesh. He glanced sideways at the boys, not wanting to communicate the line of unreasonable fear that was inserting itself into his mind, and gripping his body.

Suddenly he jumped up. 'Leave the cooking,' he commanded. 'Come and get some wood. We'll make a good fire.'

The fire on which they were cooking was necessarily low. They dragged dry branches from the bank of the stream. They piled them up, away from the hut, but still beneath the high trees. Wakeman stuffed a few branches of casuarina needles into the piled branches, took a piece of paper, lighted a spill and thrust it into the leaves. They flared and crackled. There was a quick spurt and the flame shot up into the timbers. The fire burst rapidly over the branches, and the cold was gone. They made tea and drank it before the stew was ready. There was a quick mumbled grace, and they were sipping tea. He sensed the moment of fear was gone.

At first the boys were wary of the stew. They were thinking about the rabbit in its skin and fur, and then the bucking and twitching, and finally being still. They could see the

rabbit being turned inside out, and the skin flung away, and then the small naked carcass. Come to think of it, they had seen these in the delicatessen, but then they were frozen, not warm with the blood dripping from them. After a time they tasted the stew, and were glad enough to eat.

When the fire died down they turned in. As they bedded down, the curate could feel their nervousness grow. He began to tell them stories of his days in the army. They were only mildly interested. He knew their thoughts were elsewhere, back at the Point in the tall terraced houses, in the tenements that crouched up against one another, where sounds could be heard through the walls, and people knew they were not alone.

Finally they were asleep, the light from the petrol lamp flickering on them. He decided to let it burn, but he turned it to minimal. He looked at their faces and felt a pang. They looked so lonely, but he could not help feeling that loneliness was habitual, not just the result of their being away from their community.

When he lay back he felt the ache himself. How did one accomplish the task he had set out to do? He felt far from preachy, and he was cold on religion. It was faith these boys needed. They needed faith in humanity. When he thought about that, his lip curled a little. He didn't even have that himself. They just needed faith, he thought, but then that would have to start with the One who had made the universe. They had to trust that One, believing He hadn't failed.

Other thoughts came. He saw their environment as a kind of prison. They couldn't break out of it. In the two years he had been there, only one girl had matriculated, and she was hesitating about tertiary training. He sighed and lay back. Some of the boys were mumbling in their sleep, and the solid Briney was making frightened noises. He felt the unease under their sleep.

He knew they thought he was conniving, trying to get them to religion, but it wasn't religion that gripped him. It was faith that mattered. Religion could just be trappings. He sighed and settled in. His last thought was that they could see the milking in the morning.

The silence was deadly. He tried to wake them but they protested drowsily. He lit the fire for their breakfast tea. He opened the cereal cartons, and set out the enamel plates. He put eggs on to boil, and started to make toast when the red ashes formed at the base of the fire.

Hickey was the first to join him. He smelled the cigarette smoke and looked up. Hickey was rubbing the sleep out of his eyes. He looked frowzy.

His first words were, 'When do we go home?' Wakeman was silent, feeling the sickness in the pit of his stomach. 'After some days,' he said briefly.

Hickey drew on the cigarette. 'What'll we do all the time?' he asked.

'Hike,' he said briefly. 'See the Valley. Watch the milking.' He paused. 'Do some shooting, and some fishing.'

'Don't like shooting, Mister Wakeman,' Hickey said. 'Do as little as you can. The fellers are a bit frightened.'

Wakeman bent over the fire, the ashes hot on him. The toast caught a little, leaving its carbon where the flame had spurted. 'What frightens them about the rifle?' he asked. 'I don't know,' said Hickey.

Briney came up behind them. He had a blanket about him. Hickey asked the question without turning. 'Why don't the fellers like the gun?'

Briney stood staring down at the fire. 'Afraid of accidents,' he said. 'Lots of accidents happen at the Point.'

They had too. The man remembered the morning he had found a man in the back ally, dead. He was staring up at the morning sun, sightless. There had been other times. No one had an explanation except, 'accident'.

The curate turned the bread over. 'What about fishing?' he asked. 'Ah,' said Briney, 'they all like fishing.'

After the cereal, the toast and the eggs, they made their way to the dairy. The milking was almost finished. The boys watched the proceedings, wide-eyed. They stared at the milking machine as it chugged and chumped and made its swishing noises as the milk spurted up from the cups, in the glass-line, and then made its way to the separator room. They were fascinated by the separator, watching the blue-white skim flow from one spout in a heavy flow, and the yellow cream dribble from another spout in a thin flow. Some of them had not even thought of milk coming from cows, although they ought to have known. They had thought only of it being in bottles.

He tried to get them to laugh. He coaxed the milk down from the udder of one cow, and then got them to look in his direction. Quick as a flash he squirted the milk from the teat, straight into Jacko's face. Some of it hit his eyes. The boys laughed a little but then things drooped.

'Vim murmured to him out of the side of his mouth, 'Where did you get this bunch? They aren't even living.'

He felt worried about that. He had thought they would have been mad with joy in escaping from the Point, in seeing new things, and in the rough and tumble of camping. So far there was no response.

They were better at the stream, or as they called it, 'the river'. It was wide, of course, but shallow. Only in a few places was it deep enough for a swim. Some of them had gone as far as North Sydney to the Olympic Pool, but in no way would they venture into this water. They brought their

rods to the water, and then asked about bait. He told them about the fast worms in the clay near the edge of the water, and about the frogs. It was difficult to get frogs in the daytime, but they managed to find a few. In fact they became so interested in the frogs that they were frog-hunting instead of bait-hunting. Some dug away for the fast worms, and found the long, wriggling beauties.

He had brought some spinners with him, and a perch rose at his first cast. He caught it, bringing it to the shore with a quick pull and a flick. They dived on it before it could make the water. Someone wanted to use his spinner so he dug out a similar one from his lure box. There was a lot of casting but no result. One of them baited up a frog. Colin had to show him how, and he looked a bit green around the mouth. He cast it out, low across the stream. There was a faint 'plop!', the bait sank, and suddenly the line was taut. Wakeman knew what it was and waited, curious to see how they would react.

It was Jacko who had the bite. He wound his reel, but the catch on his line kept tugging away. Wakeman remained silent, and watched Jacko learn. Jacko would play it out, and then when the line slackened would reel it in. Wakeman knew what was on the line might hide in the crevices of the hidden rocks, below the water-line. Finally, however, Jacko pulled it to the shore, and there it was on the grassy flat, flipping and flapping—a long, shining, black creature.

Briney shouted, 'It's a water snake,' and the fellows began to run. Jacko wasn't having that, and he made towards the catch.

Wakeman called out, 'Handle it carefully. It's an eel.' He had always thought eels were vicious, so he helped the boy unhook it. It lashed about, even when he put his Bluchers over it. The slime from its skin helped it to squeeze itself away, but Wakeman had cut it at the throat, and it lay helpless, still flapping and curling. The boys were fascinated, but horrified.

'You'll never get me in that water,' said Briney, and he shuddered.

'Wait till you taste the eel,' said Wakeman. 'It's delicious.' They looked dubious, but laid it alongside the expired perch.

They returned at lunch-time to eat. The minister detected a slight change in the group. For some strange reason they were now calling him 'Sir'. It is true that amongst themselves they were still calling him Thingo. He heard that, but he didn't mind it. A change had happened, however slight. In the afternoon they volunteered to go after rabbits. That delighted him, but he did not show it. When they went, the line, instead of being bunched up against him, and behind him, was stretched out. Often they straggled a long way behind. He knew their fear was not destroyed, but then it would take time. For the first time in two years he felt a slight edge of joy. Before there had been a lot of pain, but he had been severe with it. He had damped it down.

Tim Leaney noticed the difference. 'They thanked me when they called for the milk,' he said. He looked steadily at his friend. 'Colin, I like that Hickey boy. I have a feeling he could turn out well.'

Hickey—slouched, skinny, cigarette hanging out of one side of the mouth. When he walked it was like an animal walking on hot bricks; he would be crouched, waiting for something to happen. But then, where he lived things did happen, most of them negative, some of them cruel. Hickey's two parents lived in the home, and that was at least something, even if they quarrelled incessantly.

In the evening they began to talk. He could sense the new freedom they had. True, it was a partial freedom, and one

which they held cautiously. He remembered the day Lord Mountbatten had come into their prison camp, the day after the Japanese had capitulated. He had hoisted his wife onto a table, and he had jumped up onto it. He had held his wife's hand aloft and shouted, 'Hey men, meet the missus!' They had cheered at that, even if feebly.

Then the Commander had said, 'Out you go, fellows. You're free. We've taken away the Jap guards. There are plucky little Gurkhas watching around for any lone Japs. So go out and enjoy yourselves.'

He remembered the silence. Some had wandered towards the gates, and then drawn back. There were wistful looks, but no one had walked out. He did, and a few of his close mates. He remembered the mixture of sensations—sheer joy and deep terror. Not until they had wandered around for a time did they break the feeling of guilt for being outside. He remembered some of his dreams on the hospital ship as they returned to Australia. He had sweated in those dreams, sweated with the guilt of being free. He would see the guards coming for him, to take him back.

Prison mentality! He saw it in the boys, and he ached. Then he remembered it had been generations which had lived at the Point. He remembered their agoraphobia, their dislike of open spaces. The trembling came back, as he realised what was happening. But the fear was still there.

That night he talked as he had never talked with them. He had used the Bible with them on Sundays, but he just quoted from memory. No one had called him a Bible-basher, and he didn't think they saw him that way. He knew, however, that they thought him an intruder. He just didn't belong to the Point. He hadn't minded that. Tonight, for some strange reason, he had an entree into their group. They had accepted him. They kept calling him 'Sir', and he knew that was respect.

So they talked together. They came out into the open and

asked him why he took the time to be interested in them. They felt free enough to accuse him of religious gimmickry. 'You just give us good things and good times so you can make us into little Jesuses,' one said.

He grinned at that, screwed up his eyes, and said, 'Do you reckon I could succeed?' They grasped the point, and after that flowed more freely.

At midnight they stirred the hot ashes in the fireplace and cooked sausages, piercing them with green sticks, and holding them over the low flames. The fat dripped, and the flames sputtered. They drank billy tea, which was new to them, and he recited Henry Lawson and Banjo Patterson to them. When they liked that, he quoted Studdart Kennedy, 'Woodbine Willy' of a war long before. They liked the gutsy sentiments of that old warrior. They didn't want to go to sleep.

He lay awake into the night. He could not sleep. He tossed between joy and dread. He knew something had happened. He also knew it could be easily lost. If they thought there was something false about him they would drop him, and the situation would be irrecoverable. If they accepted him, that is if they sealed the acceptance, it would be forever. They had been hurt until they were hardened. He knew that self-protective device.

He kept seeing the Point as a prison with invisible walls, and in no way would it let the boys grow up into free young men. When they were old they would be holding their own children into the Point. Out there was a world against them, and they had a camaraderie which had been born of despair and bitterness. He knew that. He also knew it was a camaraderie that was imprisonment itself.

His luminous watch told him it was past three. He gathered his rod, his torch, his lure and spinners, and crept from the hut. In a way it was betraying the boys. They depended upon him for security. He mustn't leave them. If they found

him gone they would wonder. As he quietly opened door, he saw the .22 rifle leaning against a wall, near Hickey's head. Hickey must have taken it to himself'. Maybe he imagined himself as a hunter. Perhaps tomorrow he would hunt a rabbit, and even skin it.

It was warm outside, and the excitement of the true fisherman gripped him. The perch would rise in this warmth. Maybe he could lure a trout. He didn't fancy the idea of an eel, not in the dark. He grinned as he thought of the boys eating the eel and enjoying it. He had skinned it, cut it into short steaks, and then boiled it with herbs and spices to take out the eel-smell. After that he had fried the steaks in butter, salted and peppered them, and shaken a little tomato sauce on them. He could see the group, eating with uninhibited delight. He felt as warm as the night.

He knew where to go to get a good cast. He thought first of frogs, but then put on his best wobbler. On the second cast he caught a large perch. He had to play it, but he loved the sound of the flipping and flopping in the water, the cry of the reel as it spun and the ratchet clicked merrily. He felt his own spirits rise. Somehow the camp was going to be successful. The boys would glimpse freedom, and then they would want it. He visualised Hickey, standing upright, and not crouching or slouching. He saw him alert, but not tensed. He saw him relaxed, and accepting life. His mind flitted Briney and Jacko and Henderson. He began to think of the girls, and his mind finished with the picture of the deaconess. He lingered over her name, and then over her, and might have gone further, but the reel was crying out again, and in no time there was a perch beside him, flapping beside the first fish. He exulted, thinking of the early dawn and a fire, and fish frying in the large pan. He would mix eggs and milk and flour, and there would be a golden batter.

Suddenly he knew he would succeed. It was crazy, of course, to assume that. You could never be sure. Things

could happen and the work become unstuck. This assurance, however, came from a source he knew well, but which always awed him. The assurance would come unsought and unbidden. Behind it there was a shade he did not recognise. Rather, he did recognise it, but rejected it as impossible. It was a shade he had known in the heart of war action and in the centre of suffering in the prison camp. He kept silent for a moment. Then it passed. He kept playing his wobbler, and suddenly there was a tugging. Not the long dead pull of a monster eel, or the steady tug of the perch, but—he knew it—the tentative and vital tug of a trout. His heart rose again, and he played the line with joy. Trout took longer than perch, and the one he had was a beauty. He had a delicious sense of terror lest he lose it.

But he did not lose it. It came to shore when it was exhausted, but even then it flapped on the grassy bank, and he had to use the torch to see that it did not regain the water. His eyes opened wide. He had seen trout as large as that before, but not in his own hands. He felt abrim with delight. He packed the wobbler away with the lures and the spinners. He shortened the nylon line until it was wound in, and the end of the line hooked into the rod. He picked up the fish and made his way back to the hut.

He was dreaming now, and he knew it. Freedom, and fish, and the boys and the deaconess all came together in his mind so that he knew a new and strange joy. Again there was that shade hovering behind it like a sombre foil, but it did not matter. He sang softly to himself, and for once was careless where he walked. In a moment he was down, his foot caught in a root above the ground. When he stood up he fell again. The third time he rose, and his body slewed. He fell and cried out.

After a time he threshed into an upright position. He cried out in a voice he could not recognise. It was like a stranger crying, harshly. He let go the fish, tugged his foot

from the root, and then stood up, still making hoarse noises.

He scarcely heard the shot before he felt its impact, and he dropped immediately. He lay very, very still.

Hickey had awakened first. He had shouted to the boys, and in a flash terror had spread through the room. He had grabbed the .22 rifle, which he knew to be loaded. He opened the door, and pointed the gun in the direction of the threshing noises. The fear that gripped him paralysed his mind. All he knew was that danger lay there. So he fired.

He heard the dull thump, and rushed back to find the ammunition. Someone had turned up the petrol lamp, and it hissed as it brightened. He was slipping a cartridge into the breech of the rifle when someone said, 'Where's Sir!'

They froze in the silence. The terror that had gripped and activated them, now held them in a paralysis. Hickey put the rifle down slowly. Then he said quietly, 'Anyone have a torch?'

Before a torch was produced, Briney asked dully, 'What about the petrol lamp?' Someone produced a handkerchief so that they could hold the hot handle, and they crept out of the hut. Twenty-four hours before, no one could have moved them from that hut, not even with a crowbar. They moved slowly towards the place where the sound of the intruder had come.

Hickey went first, and he held the lamp. He was not crouched. He was wary, but he was not frightened. Suddenly he cried out, 'Oh, Jesus Christ!'

The thrill of fear gripped them all. Some of them wanted to rush away, but they were held. They moved up slowly, crowding around Hickey. Against their wills they looked.

He was face down, his broad body collapsed across the grass, and there were three fish about him, one a very large

trout. His torch had been flung near the tree and its twisted roots which arched above the grass. Some of the spinners gleamed in the light of the lamp.

Hickey gave the lamp to Jacko. He went across to where their friend lay, and he turned over the body. The eyes were closed, wonderfully enough. He might have been sleeping. But there was blood on the face, and a hole in the forehead. Somebody began to sob. Someone said, 'Oh, holy Jesus!'

Hickey put his head on the great chest and his arms around it, as far as they would go. They heard him say, 'Oh, Sir! Oh, Sir!' They all bowed their heads, as though it were a church service.

After a time Hickey picked up the torch. He gave it to Briney. 'You go and get Tim Leaney,' he said. 'Tell him to get the police, too. We'll stay here.'

When Briney had gone through the casuarinas, taking Jacko with him, Hickey stood looking down at the body. After a time he turned to the other boys. 'Maybe I'll be had up for manslaughter,' he said. 'But that doesn't matter. Anyone knows I would never have shot Sir.' He paused, staring down. 'He was a real man,' he said slowly. 'That guy really loved us.'

they nodded mutely, agreeing. He remembered his first horrified cry, 'Jesus Christ!' He said soberly, 'He was pretty much like Jesus Christ, you know.' There was no self-consciousness in his voice.

When he spoke again there was a slight edge of defiance, as though he was daring anyone to call him a sissy or religious. 'That's what he did,' he said, 'he gave us what he had.' They all knew Hickey was talking about Thingo's life itself, but it did not need to be spelled out. Indeed it was better that it wasn't.

After a time they sat around the body. It was like a solemn vigil, but it had strange overtones of peace, and even joy.

Once Hickey spoke, whilst they were waiting for police. ‘If they let me off,’ he said, ‘we’re coming back here again. We’re coming back often.’

Someone said in an awed voice, ‘Yeah, Hickey? You mean that? You fair dinkum?’

Hickey nodded. ‘Fair dinkum I am,’ he said. ‘We’re coming back here.’ His voice was firm, even commanding. ‘What’s more, we’re coming back on our own.’

They saw Tim Leaney and his wife, making their way with Briney and Jacko through the casuarinas. The petrol light was falling in pale yellow across the group. Leaney looked at their set faces, and thought he had not seen them like this before.

When he went to the body he felt a sharp pain of passion. He touched the face, tenderly. His wife began weep gently. That was when they all began to weep.

Away, far away yet, perhaps at the top of the valley, was the faint wail of the police siren. It was lost from time to time as it passed through clumps of trees, but as it came the flat it was louder. They heard it clearly. The gentle weeping flowed on.

Hickey and Leaney were standing now, together, and they both looked like men, even like brothers.

Somehow Leaney knew that Colin Wakeman had succeeded. He didn’t quite know how, but he knew.

After a time he and Hickey went to where the police car had stopped. The lights were flashing but the siren had died into silence.

Fructifying Fantasy



It was my favourite pastime—looking through the library of another. Of course we can get something of the mind of another by doing this: we can discern the likes, assess the predilections, follow the lines of affinity—like to like.

So I was not very clever, for the thrust of this library was all in one direction—that of allegory and fantasy. ‘Ha!’ I said to myself, ‘this young woman lives in an unreal world. She has opted out of the world of reality.’

Even as I said the words I knew them to be true, but not wholly. I knew that, because it is difficult to say what is, in fact, the world of reality. The philosophers have debated this point very finely—so much so that they leave us no place for dogmatism as to the nature of reality.

Also I knew by the names of her authors that they were those who were sure that they dealt with reality. Lewis, Macdonald, Tolkein, Williams—and the like—they are the masters of allegory and fantasy. Even so, they did not care simply to write fantasy and allegory. They wrote for pleasure; the pleasure was in the writing, and—they hoped—in the subsequent reading. They wanted their readers to be lost in the world of fictional character, movement and action. They were (they are) the Walt Disneys of the human world. As that

great artist transposed the elements of humans to animals and incarnated human foibles, failures, graces and greatnesses into understandable reality, so true deity and humanity expresses itself most freely in allegory and fantasy, defeating the solemn attempts at communication by the more philosophical, theological and propositional writers, whose serious hearts are intent on didactic insistence. In a world of flurry and fun, of incredible happenings and creatures, the truth makes its happy way, like a wending, laughing creek whose unconscious goal is the glory of unending oceans.

So I pondered in the presence of precious volumes and pleasurable preachings. I lay on the couch, thinking about the young lady who had read them all. 'Doubtless,' I thought to myself, 'she lives with these allegorical and fantastical creatures: doubtless she lives and moves and has her being in them. Is this good for her?'

Knowing the delicious nature of reading, knowing the interesting realms into which the human mind can make its releasing escape, I understood her allegorical adventures. My sympathy lay with her, but the (so-called) Puritan strata that is within most of us recalled me to the responsibility man. The wise preacher had said, 'This is the whole of man, to fear God and keep His commandments.' I was forced to ask myself whether the reading and writings of allegory devotees was included in this statement.

In my mind I summoned the young person, tile possessor and the reader of these many books. In as kindly a manner as was possible to me, and with all appearances of warm wisdom and general graciousness, I asked her some special questions.

'Do you enjoy your reading of these writers?' I asked her. She nodded, though with some hidden humour in her eyes. 'What do you enjoy?' I asked.

'Oh, the stories,' she said simply, as though she knew I

must be an idiot.

'What, in the stories, do you like?' I asked.

'Oh, the characters, the creatures, the action and the events,' she answered with youthful tolerance. She really seemed to have no special taste for the hidden, the occult, the esoteric. Yet all her characters and all the action seemed esoteric enough.

'But the allegorical meaning, the significance of each character, the purpose behind the fantasy,' I asked, '—what of them?'

Her eyebrows rose. She had slight pity in her eyes, but she was kind. 'Goodness knows!' she exclaimed. 'They could be anything.'

I was inclined to agree with her. 'You could be right,' I said, sounding as sagacious as possible. 'Yes, you could be right.'

Her eyes were still filled with laughter. Then she took pity on me. 'I guess there must be lots of meaning in them all,' she said, 'but then I just enjoy reading them.'

'What then,' I asked, 'of the true world around you? What of it?'

She seemed not to understand my meaning. 'It is always there,' she said, 'and I live in it. We live in it.'

'You do not have a privatised world of your own?' I asked, 'ma world into which you escape with reading these volumes?'

She was gently tolerant. 'Not at all,' she answered seriously, 'not at all. Whilst I distinguish in practice between the two worlds, I know they are of the one piece. I understand the world about me; that is why I can appreciate the world of allegory and fantasy, for it is about the things of this world. The stories teach us to know our world.' She looked at me solemnly, barely hiding her laughter. 'They don't try to teach or preach,' she said. 'That is the good thing about them.'

In my thoughts I allowed her to go. I needed time to consider her carefree wisdom. Without much effort I decided that she was probably right. It seemed she did not live (or escape into) a fantasy world.

Then I began to ponder the young woman herself. I perceived that she—in her guileless way—was a very sage young person. I realised that she had gained her wisdom to a great degree from these older—and wiser—writers. Knowing fiction of every kind to be in the way of truth, if not always in the way of fact, I felt a heightened desire to let the tides of my own (modest?) wisdom flow through fluid fiction. For some moments I indulged in that dream before returning to the subject.

On return, I thought this: if a person—such as this young lady—were to spend much of her early life gaining wisdom from her reading, and if her enjoyment were to make these things gifts of joy (as also pain, pity, compassion, anger, hurt, indignation) to her, then the encapsulating of so much human knowledge and feeling ought to have its outflow to the humanity about her and ahead of her.

By this I do not mean in a moralistic way that she should repay joy for joy, love for love, and the like. I am old enough to know that the gifts of God are given unconditionally. One does not have to pay for them. One may simply delight in them. Love, however, is a strong dictator, and issues mandates of sharing and distribution. Hence the impulsion within love to give out its gifts to others.

I felt like recalling the young lady. Instead, however, I dressed the air about me in silent, solemn manner. I gave my homily in quietness to the listening room. I said, 'Young lady, you are very rich. You have not despoiled these books—these rare and choice volumes—but you are laden with spoils from them. They have been prodigal with their riches, and so now you must be.'

I could imagine her standing there, her eyes on me, still

amused. This time, however, I would be insistent in my wisdom. I would say, 'You have been filling your mind, your memory, your data bank, and your inner secret heart with the jewels and joys of these incredible authors. Now you must not keep these things to yourself or just for yourself, but you must make new fresh rivers of your own flow out to others, to the world, to posterity.'

She was not there of course, or, if so, then only to my imagination. But I knew she would be serious behind her smiles, gripped if incredulous that she too had such gifts as did they.

in fact, my dear reader friends, I will tell you a bit of authentic news. I told her—at a point in her own history—that she ought to begin the great adventure of revelations to others. I saw the delight in her eyes, the sudden hope on her face, and the fear of faith in her gestures.

She could not have known consciously—I think—that she had been gathering great treasures for such a time as this. She could not have known wholly that 'the child is father of the man' and that she was shaping much of fructifying years ahead for herself. Her enjoyment in reading and imagination had been artless enough, but now she was faced with the gift of herself—from God—and would need to share that gift with others.

Not in that room, but in another place, I saw her consider the matter thoughtfully, and I am sure I am right when I say that she gave assent to the thought and the mandate. Equally sure am I that she was greatly delighted and immensely fulfilled at that proleptic moment of accomplishment.

in the room I could sense that every volume gave a silent cheer. Whilst I will not say that the decision set them dancing, I cannot deny that with my departure—I mean, after it—they did not hold hilarious celebration.

Into life

He cannot know he's dead
 Who's died, whose apathy
 Is as to him true life itself,
 Whose lethargy seems dynamism,
 Whose pall seems vibrant life itself,
 Who thinks his pulseless self
 A surging, sweeping entity
 That equals or outmodes
 The energy of others. He cannot know
 His death as death first unannounced,
 Then undiscovered. Dead while he lives,
 He underscores his death
 By taking it for life.

There in the pristine breath
 Of first creation, the primeval emergence
 Of the true humanity, the gentle gift
 Of fulsome living, the incredible
 Disposition of the only Father—the giving
 Of whole humanic being—was life,
 Authentic life, the eager sighting
 Of the Eternal Love, the creative giving,
 The kindly and foreseeing intention
 Of the unwavering and insistent Creator

Who cared to bring us into being—
 Which being is the life we speak of—
 Causing our palpable flesh
 To have unerring correspondence
 With His own Self, His Godhead
 And His eternal Life.

Here it is I stumble at the mystery,
 Wave feeble hands and weakly protest
 At my own flabby comprehension,
 My debilitated non-understanding.
 How can I know the limitless dimensions
 Of the Eternal? How peer into His deeps,
 Or swim the depthless fathoms
 Of His incomprehensible Being?
 Pity me then and nod your head
 In intelligent condescension, recognition
 Of my minute knowledge. Yet you—as me—
 What do you know? Know truly?
 The Fountain of Living Waters surges forth
 From sources which are His own, perpetual,
 The deeps of His autonomous Self,
 Inexhaustible, incessant action,
 Immutable but bringing constant change,
 Yet unable ever to be what He is not,
 Or other than what He is; nor desiring
 To be other than what He is as Love
 And Love in peerless holiness and joy.

My delusions of personal grandeur, innate power,
 And other imagined self-contained autonomy,
 My vainly conceived independence
 And powers of brilliant accomplishment,
 Are my own crazed dreams, fragments
 Of the recurring nightmares, the broken sherds

Of recycled chimeras, the dull stabbings
 Of some former aspirations, defunct fantasies
 That now belong to the Aforetime.
 There was then an Aforetime
 Which was the true Aforetime
 When I revelled in the delight of music,
 Music that was its own true self,
 Some throbbing multiple symphony
 Of another existence, genuine, the real,
 But now dulled to this faint but troublesome
 Memory. This inanimate insistence
 Which groggily, gracelessly
 Feels the nauseous waves on a pointless nostalgia.

Hence—as I said—I am feeble,
 Hands waving restlessly in self-deprecation:
 Eyes staring sightlessly into despair's mists
 On the drear moors of endless incomprehension
 As the first fearful intimation penetrates
 That I am unliving, but comprehending,
 Yet with the fading background apprehension
 That once I had lived—there is the first *anthropos*.
 I am a contradiction (so to speak)
 Of a man in death, existing but not living,
 Not being a reality, having no continuing ontology,
 Being only a ghost or a bodied zombie,
 A death-thing, caricaturing life.

In the early years this was my lot,
 My dally experience of mindless existence
 Posing as life, convincing, and so imprisoning.
 The contradiction is—I lived while dead!
 I have no explanation but that
 Which living men—men from the grave,
 Brilliant from recent resurrection—

Can share in astounded tones,
 in wondering awe and eager operations
 Of their new life, the fresh dynamism
 Of unspeakable revelations. They shine
 With authentic amazement, viewing past death
 With thund'rous astoundment.
 They scarcely believe the death now past
 Because of their present livingness.

In death the mortal creature sees not God.
 Yet sees with deathful eyes and troubled mind
 The looming monstrous thing
 Wavering within his dulled consciousness
 As a dark and threatening formless Form
 Bearing upon him vengefully
 Or withdrawing into the cold carelessness
 Indigent to proud and nerveless Deity,
 Abandoning the lone lost spirit
 O! the already deceased, the deathful entity
 Once proudly the princeling man.

In life all elements are changed.
 Speak not for the moment: tell not how
 Life comes to death and brings to life—
 Mention if you will a Cross, a Tomb
 The latter empty in the unique dawn)
 And the alighting Spirit in the upper room
 Across the doomed city and then world—
 For life has come, has penetrated,
 And in this life the revelation
 Which brings the undernourished understanding
 To the growing and the flourishing,
 The blossoming and the burgeoning Comprehension.
 This then brings fruit.

Now God is Love! This One who ever was,
 Who was the Light, was ever Love,
 This One appears as is: illumination
 Informs and fires the mind
 Which once was dead in alien pall
 But now in trembling comprehension
 Grasps the unspeakable truth, is grasped
 By the new and flooding comprehension.
 Here are the buried treasures,
 Here the inexhaustible resources
 Providing the needed assurance (insurance)
 Against the dreaded anticipated poverty,
 An inner predicted mind-bankruptcy
 Or sudden cessation of genuine being,
 A painful memory of the former death
 Threatening to come again. It cannot be.
 The resurrected entity, the real man,
 Is equipped for the forever, is supplied
 From the intimate and everflowing resources
 Of the Eternal Lord. The flowing fountains
 Thrust up and out of those Resources,
 Being dynamic and immutable.

Be that as it may, I feel and know
 The immediate impact, the direct reality
 Of the living God. His love, His light
 Flow on my awakened being, evoking life
 So that I see and know He is as is,
 Comprehending without contemplation.
 Love was a word, but Love is life,
 A careless amazement, vast knowing
 Of swift burgeoning reality, the warm proximity
 Of the serving Father, the gentle touch
 Of the tender Eternal. Love's knowing comes
 Serene and unbidden, yet giving freely

Of its own tranquillity, its communicated life
 Of pointful and purposeful being.
 It catches up into the progressive process
 That moves all things to its own *telos*,
 The ultimate goals of growthful love.

Father, the articulation fails. The revelating
 Defeats itself as the vast ocean of Your love
 Refuses the tiny channel, the mere trickle
 Of my impassioned communication.
 Better they all with me gaze on Yourself
 With changeless adoration. Better they
 Contemplate ceaselessly the irresistible reality
 Of Your immutable Being. To know Love
 Is ultimately to see—whether by faith or sight—
 The truth—that You are Love—and thus to know,
 Not in the old verbal categories, or human comparisons,
 But in the new and living terms of truth,
 That which no eye has seen, no ear has heard,
 No mind imagined, this brilliant verity
 That Spirit brings to heart and mind,
 Translating in new linguistics, true utterance,
 The eternal truth, truth which flows
 Out of the living knowledge, gaining the mind
 Of mortal man, gripping his soul
 Where Love forever grants to him
 Palpable participation in the life of God.
 This fellowship with the insistent,
 With the unchanging God, the Deity
 Whose Name is Love. It is a sharing
 In the true Family, the entire Familyhood
 Of the eternal Father, Our Father, God.
 this then is 'into life'. This then is resurrection from the dead.

The theological student



He could not consciously remember having any against God, although he knew most people did have some anger. He had once spent some minutes thinking about the whole matter, but he easily gave it up. He had anger. but then also he had no love—for God, that is.

When his friend Francis asked him at the seminary why he had studied theology, he just shrugged his shoulders gently, smiled his soft, disarming smile, and gave no answer. When Francis persisted, he asked him, ‘Why then do *you* study theology?’ He watched amusedly whilst Francis went into a passion of explanation. in the heat of that passion Francis forgot to ask Demetrius in return why he studied theology.

For the most part the students were busy with life, and busy with study, and they didn’t go too personally into reasons for being in seminary. It was generally understood that you would not be in seminary if you did not have ordination in mind, and of course most did.

Demetrius was brilliant. No one doubted that. His university course marked him out as an unusual scholar, what with all his distinctions and credits. In a way the seminarians were quite proud of him. They may have envied his

accomplishments, but he was the kind of man who made no stir with what he did. It is to be doubted whether anyone hated him, even if no one appeared to have special love for him. They recognised his abilities, and left matters there.

He, for his part, seemed to like that. He went on his quiet, steady way, studying, doing research, and getting his degrees. Nothing seemed to disturb him. Nor did he envy others: perhaps because he had little reason to do so. He completed his seminary course with distinction and honours, and took a considerable number of prizes. It was quite amusing to see him go forward at the call of his name to collect prizes for firsts or seconds, though rarely seconds.

So he was a man covered with honours. The church leaders seemed to expect great things from him and they suggested ordination. He said he would want to think about that a little more, as it hadn’t been in his mind. They were somewhat surprised and even a little disturbed, but agreed he should have time to do so.

After a year or more, he agreed to ordination, and he was made a deacon. Later he was ordained a priest, and being in clerical orders it was suggested he take a parish. He shook his head at that. For the moment he did not wish to take a parish. They understood, they said, for he was finishing his doctorate in theology, and perhaps wished to concentrate on that.

Just prior to completing his doctorate they suggested he might like to be a lecturer in the seminary. The thought seemed to intrigue him, and he said he would need time to think about that. When he received his doctorate he thought he ought to do theological research studies in Germany, for he had a liking for Teutonic theologians. Also he had a number of particular matters which he desired to research.

He was never short of money, for his family was a wealthy Greek family, and looked after him well. They belonged to the Greek Orthodox Church, but did not seem to mind the

fact that he was ordained in another church. So with their support he continued his studies.

Francis his friend barely made his way through seminary training. He became a curate in a parish, and was very busy. He loved people very much, and was always anxious to help them. He had a high view of God and His love, of man also, although he had a very Augustinian and Pauline view of man, namely that man was incredibly depraved because of his fall into sin when he rebelled against God. Demetrius was not amused at this theology. He seemed to be quite detached about the various theological views, although he was deeply interested in them all.

The closest thing to friendship that Demetrius had was his relationship with Francis. He knew Francis was no scholar, but also knew that Francis had a passionate regard for the truth, and was always trying to learn more of it. For this reason Demetrius would lend him appropriate books. For example, if Francis was gripped by the theme of justification, then Demetrius would work out a good reading plan, and supply his friend with the appropriate books and journals, marking off the related articles for him. For this Francis was most grateful.

Demetrius puzzled him greatly. He appeared to have no ambition. He just liked studying theology. He never seemed to put it to any use. Whilst, from time to time he lectured in theology, he rarely preached a sermon. He never seemed to be attracted by the idea of a relationship with a woman, or by the thought of marriage. He was teased about these things, but took the teasing good-naturedly and calmly. He just went on with his life.

He refused the offer of a lectureship at the seminary, but received an offer to take up the position of librarian. The seminary had a vast library, and one filled with antiquarian

treasures. His salary was modest, but he seemed to care little. Perhaps his family supplemented his income. He was most helpful to the students in directing them to the materials they needed. For himself, he took the opportunity to extend his reading, although he seemed indifferent to obtaining further degrees. In fact he had all the degrees he needed, and the few articles he wrote were highly respected throughout the theological world.

Francis had a deep affection for his friend, but was continually puzzled by him. He never detected the slightest warmth in regard to preaching, or even teaching. He wondered how Demetrius could be a priest and yet not want to take a parish, take up a chaplaincy, share in some social work, or give himself to personal counselling.

When he questioned Demetrius, the man would give his quiet smile and wave it off. 'Not my cup of tea,' he would say, and Francis would have to accept that.

One day when Demetrius gave him this answer, he suddenly felt compelled to ask, 'What, then, is your cup of tea?'

Demetrius looked at him thoughtfully, but simply said, 'I really don't know.'

Francis was quite shocked. 'Every one has a cup of tea,' he said sturdily.

'Do they now?' said Demetrius non-committally, and smiled again.

This time, when he left his friend, Francis was disturbed. There had always been an uneasiness in his mind about Demetrius, but it had been mostly unconscious. Now it surfaced. He took the conversation away in his mind, and thought about it. It worried him until Rene his wife detected something unusual, and made him open up on the score.

Rene was a discerning person. She had been a deaconess at the seminary, and had done part of the course with both Francis and Demetrius. She was an uncomplicated person,

and generally spoke her mind with vigour.

'He has never experienced God,' she said. 'That's his only problem.'

Her statement shocked Francis. He could not imagine a person studying all that theology without knowing God.

'Mind you,' Rene said, 'it is not that he is a wicked man. He doesn't have anything against God. He just doesn't know Him.'

Francis stared at her, aghast. Next time he and Demetrius talked, he blurted out what was on his mind. 'Do you know God?' he asked. 'I mean, do you know Him personally?'

Demetrius seemed slightly mused, but remained serious out of regard for Francis. 'I know a lot about God,' he said, 'but I don't think I have ever wanted to know Him.'

Francis looked as though he would have liked to hold both hands to his ears, but he struggled on, bravely. 'You mean to say,' he said, 'that you, who have studied more theology than any of us, don't really know God, and that you don't want to know Him?'

Demetrius nodded. The smile had gone, but he was gentle enough. 'As yet I don't want to know Him,' he said. Then he asked, 'Why should I?'

Francis seemed too overcome with inward emotions. He just kept staring at Demetrius, and after a time went away. Demetrius looked after him thoughtfully, but the moment passed and he was his old detached self. He immersed himself in one of the Teutons, Moltmann to be precise. He quite liked Moltmann.

Francis kept thinking about the matter, but Demetrius didn't. When Francis broached it again, Demetrius looked at him thoughtfully, but did not seem to mind.

'Whether a person can know God or not,' he said, 'doesn't figure in my thinking. I am sure some believe they know Him, and that some believe they don't. They may be right: they may be wrong. I have no way of knowing.'

'Are you an agnostic?' asked Francis, astonished.

Demetrius thought about that. 'Probably not,' he answered.

'Then an atheist?' Francis said.

'I really don't think there are atheists in fact,' Demetrius said. 'I am sure everyone needs to think there is a God, and so they do.'

'And is there a God?' Francis asked, looking closely at his friend.

'Oh, I would think so,' Demetrius said. 'I have always operated on the idea that there is, but then I have never been in belief or unbelief as such. I simply want to know all I can know.'

This thought was beyond Francis. He left quite deep in thought, and Rene had to rouse him out of it. 'You'll never get any change out of Demetrius,' she said, 'so don't lose any sleep. That's the way he's decided to be, and that's the way he is.'

'This reasoning, too, was beyond Francis. He was a bit awed at his wife's discernment. He busied himself with ministry, which was personal, in the study, and in the pulpit. That made him feel happy. Rene liked him that way, and she was a good wife, as well as a good teacher. The women loved her, and she helped them greatly.

He just feared going near Demetrius. He had discovered a Demetrius whom he had not known, but he supposed Demetrius had not changed. That was how he had always been, and it was just that Francis had not understood him. Rene did, but then she was undisturbed by her knowledge. Francis was greatly disturbed. He thought, he prayed, he even wept.

One day he had an idea. He talked with Demetrius. He had gone to him for reading material on the subject of suffering, and Demetrius had listed some reading for him. On the strength of the subject, Francis asked his friend whether

he had gone through great suffering.

'Goodness, no!' Demetrius said. 'I've lived a very quiet life. Quite sheltered in fact.'

'If you had suffered, then you could be quite angry with God. This would explain a lot.'

'Angry with God!' Demetrius exclaimed. 'For goodness' sake, why should I be angry with God?' He looked calmly at Francis. 'How could you be angry with someone you don't even know?'

'Perhaps you don't know Him because you won't,' said Francis. 'Perhaps you are angry and don't know it. Your anger then would have turned you against Him.' He could not fathom the calm smile that was on Demetrius's face. 'It may be that as a babe or a child something happened which shocked you, and now you cannot cope with the thought of God.'

Demetrius was unruffled. 'I can cope very well with the idea of God,' he said, 'but I admit I have no desire to cope with Him, Himself. I ask myself why I should know God. What I want to know is who and what He is, what He thinks and what He does.'

Francis was astonished. 'Why would you want to know that, if you don't want to know Him?' Demetrius seemed uninclined to answer and Francis left, gripping the reading list in a passionate hand. He exploded that night in the bed room with Rene.

She was calm and dispassionate. 'You can't make a person want to know God.' Then she looked at him curiously. 'Don't let it get to you,' she said, 'and for goodness' sake don't play the counsellor with him. You'll get nowhere.'

She was deeply in love with Francis. She liked his unswerving honesty, his unfailing integrity. She envied him. For herself, she knew she vascillated quite a bit. She was uncomplicated, but when things became complicated, then that was the time she vascillated. She played time off, trusting that

things would sort themselves out, and since they generally seemed to do so, then for this reason she didn't look too critically at her own failures in total integrity.

Francis was like a dog with a bone or a terrier with a rat. Demetrius did not appear to mind his persistent questioning, and answered as often as he could; always calmly, too. He never seemed to have bursts of passion, and certainly never any deep feelings, either positively or otherwise. He was not exactly amused with Francis's interrogation, but then he showed no resentment.

At Synod meetings, when sharp issues arose, it became customary for the body of representatives to appeal, time and again, to Demetrius to give a detached and objective view of a subject. He was good at this. No one ever questioned him on the matter of partiality. He seemed to have no axe to grind. Some didn't like this. Old Carrickdove, the City Archdeacon, reckoned Demetrius was totally unfeeling, always emotionally uninvolved.

'Can't come at the man,' he often growled, but he, no less than others, was always keen to hear his comments. They were so fair, and Demetrius seemed to get to the heart of the matter.

'Too cold for me,' Carrickdove complained, '—he feels about nothing.'

This appeared to be the fact. At the same time the Synod appreciated the theological priest for his acumen. Francis, for his part, seemed perpetually troubled. He would stare at Demetrius in puzzlement, sometimes sigh, but he never gave up. He was going to get to Demetrius—Whatever.

One opportunity came when Demetrius's father died in a crash. The circumstances were strange. The police thought there were elements not above suspicion. Demetrius seemed slightly moved by the event, but saw nothing suspicious in its happening. Francis went with him to the funeral, conducted in the Greek Orthodox ritual. There were many tears,

and some wailings. Demetrius moved calmly amongst the family, but his calmness disturbed Francis. The family did not seem to mind. They knew their Demetrius.

After the funeral they were driving back to the seminary. Francis said, 'You didn't appear to be too moved by it all.' 'Didn't I?' Demetrius said, staring ahead.

Francis concentrated on his driving. 'Nothing ever seems to move you,' he said, and there was a trace of anger in his voice.

Demetrius was still staring ahead. 'I guess we never know how we are in our depths,' he commented quietly.

Francis was startled. He had never thought of Demetrius talking about 'depths'. It comforted him a little. He sighed. 'Well, do you reckon he is in glory now?'

Demetrius said gently, 'Do you mean, is he in heaven?!' He began quietly to spell out the theology of death, and the theology of life-after-death. Francis's heart went cold. He jabbed his foot on the accelerator.

When they reached the seminary Demetrius alighted. Francis said, 'What on earth do you have, apart from theology?'

Demetrius looked at him thoughtfully. 'Theology is plenty to have,' he said.

Francis snorted. 'One iota of God is worth tonnes of theology,' he said, and shot off, the tyres leaving a smidgen of rubber on the road. Demetrius stared after him for a time. Then he shrugged and went inside.

One day Francis and he discussed celibacy. Demetrius said he wasn't a celibate, nor was he opposed to celibacy.

Francis exploded. 'You never seem to side with anything,' he said. 'You just collate all the knowledge you have, but you never do anything about it.'

Demetrius gave him a thoughtful stare. 'Of course,' he said, leaving Francis bewildered and uneasy. Francis talked with Rene. She said she understood that.

'He is committed to nothing,' she said, 'and to no one. Except, of course, himself.'

'I have never seen a sliver of ambition in him,' Francis said.

She nodded. 'He thinks ambition is too paltry. I think he despises it, or maybe just disregards it, like everything else but himself.'

Francis said, 'He doesn't even seem to have self-regard.' Rene smiled. 'Where is your Pauline-Augustinian theology?' she mocked lightly. 'In us all there is a hankering for our own glory.' She quoted Milton's words:

*Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise,
(That last infirmity of noble minds),
To spurn delights, and live laborious days.*

Francis always frowned when he didn't understand his wife. Today he scowled. 'I can't imagine what you are at,' he said.

What alarmed Francis—and others, for that matter—was the lobbying that went on for the office of the next Archbishop. Dr Arnold, the present Archbishop, had tendered his resignation because of age, and the Diocese was discussing the next man for the job. There was the usual jockeying of the various parties, but the name that came up so many times was that of Demetrius, although he was quite young.

Francis knew why many wanted him. They knew he was stable theologically, and they knew he would not favour any ecclesiastical or theological party. Francis went cold and stiff inside when he thought of Demetrius being an Archbishop. He kept remembering Rene's words, 'He doesn't even know God.'

He talked with his friend. Demetrius was amused by the

pre-election lobbying. He knew his name had been put forward. 'It would serve them right if I were elected,' he said. Francis had never heard him laugh in quite that way. 'It wouldn't matter all that much,' Demetrius went on. 'If I were elected I guess I could do the job as well as most. But then, what is the point?'

'What do you mean?' Francis demanded, his eyes widening. 'Wouldn't you accept the position?'

Demetrius wasn't smiling. 'You and Rene say that I don't know God. You may well be right. I think an Archbishop should at least think he knows God. I am sure all clergy ought to believe they know God. However, there have been many who haven't, and they haven't much cared. Maybe I don't care on the whole—about knowing God, I mean—but then being Archbishop wouldn't be good either for me or the church.'

Francis felt his heart miss a beat. 'Then there is a "good",' he said quickly, 'and if there is a "good"...'

Demetrius had already cut him off. 'I'm not interested in the Archbishop's office,' he said. 'I don't favour ambitious men taking on that responsibility.'

Francis and Rene discussed the conversation, going over it carefully. This time Rene was puzzled. 'He's a bag of mystery, that one,' she said.

The new Archbishop was an import. Also he was a scholar of the first water. He and Demetrius seemed attracted to one another. The Archbishop shrewdly appraised his leading theologian. He was interested in Francis's friendship with the theologian. After a time he offered an Arch-deaconry to Francis. He seemed to have some affection for the blunt cleric and his discerning wife. A trifle bewildered Francis accepted the honour and the work that went with it. He wondered whether Demetrius would see this as ambition. Demetrius seemed to think nothing about it. In fact he was busy about becoming married.

To the surprise of many he took a wife, and they were to all appearances quite happy. Francis and Rene knew it wasn't just in appearance. The new pair was most contented. Lisa was no theologian, but she was a person of joy and that seemed to suit the calm Demetrius. He went on gathering theology, sometimes writing articles.

Then the tragedy happened. On holidays Lisa fell or slipped over a cliff. She was battered and dead by the time the rescue helicopter reached her. Rene comforted Demetrius, but he seemed undisturbed. It was Francis who noted a new look in his eye, and who heard a new note in his voice. But after some weeks the look went and the voice was back to normal. Demetrius seemed to be his usual self. Francis thought he would test out his friend's famous objectivity. It couldn't hurt, surely.

Demetrius, for the most part, ignored his tentative probes. He came out with a startling statement.

'I have never really wanted to know God,' he said. 'I have always wanted to know about God. For that matter, about man and about the universe—creation, if you like to call it that. I have just wanted to gather as much information and knowledge as I can. I still want to do that.'

'Yes,' said Francis, bewildered, not understanding his friend, 'and why is that?'

'I have always wanted to know as much as God,' said Demetrius. He stared at Francis. 'That's all,' he said abruptly, remaining quite calm.

Francis was stunned. 'I can't figure why,' he muttered.

'Oh,' Demetrius said, 'that is quite simple. If you know as much as God, then you know all you need to know.'

'You mean you are equal with God!' Francis stared in frozen horror.

'A man is a man, and God is God,' said Demetrius in a soft voice. 'You can't alter being a man, but you can be more and more of a man when you have more and more

knowledge.'

'Like hell you can!' said Francis. 'The more you know, the less of a man you are.'

Demetrius wasn't smiling. 'That is quite brilliant for a man of your calibre. Fortunately it is not true. We have been given good minds, and we ought to use them. Wisdom grows where knowledge enlarges.'

'Piffle!' said Francis hotly. He was wishing Rene were with them. She would know what to say. This was the first time Demetrius had talked like this: perhaps it had to do with Lisa's death. He felt about in his memory for a quote from Paul. 'Knowledge puffs up,' he said savagely, 'but love builds up.'

Demetrius looked at him as though seeing Francis in a new light, or perhaps for the first time. 'You certainly seem to have Paul on your side,' he said, 'but it isn't as simple as that. Love can use the knowledge it has, and the wisdom that it brings.'

Francis subsided. After a time he said gently, 'So, Demetrius, you have both love and wisdom.'

He saw the empty look in Demetrius's eyes. 'I didn't claim that,' Demetrius said, and his voice was cold, and—for that matter—tired.

Later, when they were discussing the matter, Rene said, 'He must be nearing the end. He must be running out.'

Francis didn't understand her. 'He's lived on one thought,' Rene said, 'to know as much as he can. He told you that. He wants to know all a man can know.'

'But why?' Francis demanded. 'Who would want to know everything?'

Rene too was puzzled. 'I guess nobody knows why anyone does anything. Maybe the drive is hidden too deeply to discern it.'

Next time he and Demetrius met, Francis went straight to the point. 'Why would you want to know so much? What

would its value be?'

Demetrius didn't answer the first part of the question. To the second he said, 'Every man should fill out his capacity. That's what I am doing.'

Francis said, 'You have hardly touched your emotional capacity. You never filled that out.' He didn't wait for a reaction. 'Do you want to be as God?' he asked, some heat in his voice.

Demetrius shrugged. 'To the contrary. I want to be man. The more I contrast with God, the more I am truly man. God is wholly other than man. So if I learn all I can, then I can relate to God on that score.'

Francis felt like stopping his ears with his hands. 'That's blasphemy,' he said. 'You just can't decide that this is how things are. Man is not man in his own right. He cannot be himself apart from God, but only in God.'

He could tell that Demetrius was rolling his words over in his mind, seeking out some category to explain them. He would never let ideas confront him. He had to master them, and this he did without emotion.

When he didn't reply, Francis suddenly burst out, 'Are you angry with God? Are you wanting to get back at Him? Are you cutting yourself off from Him?'

Demetrius's eyes and voice were mild. 'I wouldn't think so,' he said. 'All I know is that as a small child I made up my mind to know as much as I could, and that's what I am determined to do. You use theology for your own ends. You use it to proclaim your message, to pastor your people, to heal those whose emotions have got beyond them. I don't use anything for anything. I just know. I don't even have to use my knowledge. Wisdom just comes and I live it.'

His words were a steel barrier suddenly flung up against Francis. Later when he talked to Rene, Francis said, 'I suddenly thought of Paul's words, "The natural man receives not the things of the Spirit, for they are foolishness to him."'

Also Jesus' words, "Except a man be born anew he cannot see the Kingdom of God." Rene, he doesn't even see the Kingdom.'

In the night, when he awoke suddenly, all his thoughts were rushing up against him. He wanted to share it with Rene but she was peaceful in sleep, and he let her be. Memories of others rushed in on him, men who were professionals in their ministry. He wondered whether they had even begun to know God. Making such assessments troubled him, because he felt judgemental, and that was not his desire.

He remembered the man in seminary who had said, 'Well, I see this Diocese is going in this direction. I am mowing in the opposite direction, but if this is what is to be, then right now I do an about-turn and join 'em. You just have to join 'em.' Francis had been amazed, and for some years he had watched the man. He was a Vicar of Bray, without doubt. Francis found it difficult to talk with the man. He could never forget the words of this time-server.

Others had come to his memory. One was a man who said his mother could not decide whether he ought to go on to the stage or enter the ministry. The ministry had won—or lost—according to the way you saw it. The man was a consummate actor. He was only one amongst the politicians. They were the ones who always sensed which way the wind was blowing. They worked hard—if deviously—in their ascent up the ecclesiastical ladder. These worshipped power, the high places, and the plaudits of men, which they graciously acknowledged, or pretended nothing of the sort was going on!

Even so, there was no one like Demetrius. He had no thought of party politics, of fame or achievement; only this strange drive to know more and more. Sometimes Francis felt he was living in a nightmare. He could somehow cope with the ambitions of some, the professionalism of others, but never with this drive of Demetrius to know more than a

man had ever known, and just about as much as God is thought to know.

It was the coming of a plain evangelist which changed things. Tony Arkflew was an ordained man, seminary trained, and quite a good theologian, but he seemed to laugh at theology—anyway, at the kind of theology which had occupied Demetrius so thoroughly. This intrigued Demetrius, who—so far as Francis knew—had never been intrigued by anything. He was not only intrigued: he respected Tony and his reasoning. Francis, Rene and Demetrius had never heard anyone with the original views Tony had on the Scriptures, doctrine and theology. In fact it seemed absurd to call him an evangelist, so unlike the typical evangelist was he.

What arrested Demetrius was the strange statement that Arkflew made one day. He said, 'God doesn't reason. He is most simple.' Demetrius was startled. It was the first time that Francis had witnessed such a reaction.

'Repeat that,' he said, and Tony did. Demetrius pondered it. 'Quite remarkable,' he commented. He went off thoughtfully.

Francis asked Tony whether he thought Demetrius knew what he was getting at.

'Oh yes,' he said, 'he knew I meant that God doesn't have to work anything out. He knows. He doesn't have to plan in the way that we do. He just knows a thing and it is so. He never comes to know anything. Anything that is, is because He knows it thus.'

It was shortly after the incident that Francis noticed a change in Demetrius. He was not as calm and settled as he had always been. Sometimes he would ask Tony to come to the Greek Orthodox services, and he would sit, listening and watching, as though he might discover something. He carted Francis around to other places too. To Francis's surprise he

even asked Rene to share in what seemed to be some kind of theological window-shopping. He found nothing to fit what must have been a need, and probably the only need of this kind he had ever known.

It was Rene who first realised that Demetrius was unsettled. 'Tony's ideas have taken the heart out of his work of knowing theology,' she said.

In Synod Demetrius did not seem to be quite so detached. He was still objective, but it was as though he was weighing up different views, and questioning the validity of some of them. At the same time he seemed to look closely at members of Synod, both the laypersons and the clergy. It was as though he were discerning their approach to theology. At times it almost seemed that professionalism worried him. Demetrius had never been known to worry about things, especially things such as professionalism. He would have explained his attitude as one of realism. He would have shrugged his shoulders, denied any cynicism, and wondered what the fuss was about, if anyone had complained, and of course no one had. Folk had known and accepted his realism.

One day Demetrius talked to Rene about Lisa. 'It was strange,' Rene told Francis. 'It was like a person who has been bound and numb getting loosed and circulation coming back into him. It was both painful and joyful. Demetrius seemed in terrible pain, yet wonderfully joyful.'

When they told Tony, he just nodded. 'Sounds like the new birth to me,' he said.

Another day Demetrius talked about his father. He asked Francis how he viewed death. Francis was surprised, because Demetrius had been so calm about death—Lisa's and his father's. Now it was as though it were all just dawning on him. Francis noticed with a sense of shock that when Demetrius talked about Lisa there were tears in his eyes. Tears came to him, too. From that time Francis, Rene and Tony became Demetrius-watchers. They stared steadily at a

gentle miracle that was happening before their eyes.

Two months later the Synod was startled by something Demetrius said. He had been appealed to on some social issue and the way of representing their view to the Government. Demetrius had never been known for an outburst, and in a way what he did was not an outburst, but it was untypical of him. His voice sounded passionate, and to some even critical.

'You'll never make it that way,' he said strongly. 'Political pressure isn't Christian. It's all against the Gospel. Weakness is the only power we have, so we had better use it.'

Francis noticed the Archbishop talked quite solidly to Demetrius after the session, during the morning tea break. Demetrius seemed thoughtful, but not disturbed. At lunchtime he and Tony got together, and they were both animated. Francis had never seen Demetrius animated.

A few weeks later Demetrius invited Francis, Rene and Tony to his place for an evening meal. Francis and Rene saw that Demetrius had brought out photographs of his father and Lisa. He seemed content to look at them during the meal.

While they were eating, Demetrius suddenly smiled whimsically. The smile startled the three of them.

Demetrius said, 'This is a sort of Messianic feast.'

No one said anything. Rene felt her heart beginning to race. Francis's eyes were bright, and Tony looked curious.

'I imagine you have noticed in TV cops-and-robbers or cloak-and-dagger plots that they always end up with a celebration meal. They get into some restaurant, or even at home, and have a victory meal.'

The three nodded. Demetrius grinned. 'This is a victory meal,' he said. 'I've come to life. I've been regenerated.'

Francis's heart seemed to stop. Tony nodded calmly. 'I thought it was coming on,' he said. 'That other thing was

impossible. Knew you couldn't keep it up.' He heaped icecream on his fruit salad.

Rene felt the tears coming and stopped them. They were all silent. They all seemed to be in a dream and time was irrelevant. It drifted around them as Demetrius talked.

'It may sound silly to you, but when Tony said that God doesn't get to know anything, and that He doesn't have to ratiocinate as we do, then I was startled. My whole life was built up on the idea that getting knowledge of God, man and creation would set me up at the highest point of authentic human being.' He grinned. 'A human being is a human, *being*.' He waved a hand. 'I know it isn't original, but it's powerful. I saw nothing wrong in becoming the best human being possible. Then Tony knocked out the whole basis of my life's endeavours.'

His eyes clouded a little. 'Now I can see that in my ignorance I was incredibly arrogant. I argued that I didn't want to be equal with God, but I was building up a horrible tower of Babel in my mind. Its bricks were concepts, and its mortar was knowledge. I really thought I could get knowledge and understanding that would place me above everything.'

His shudder was almost imperceptible, but it sent a thrill through Rene. She wanted to weep with huge horror and frightening joy. Tony stared, fascinated, and Francis was immolated with a strange heat.

'That must be about the most hideous pride a human creature can know,' said Demetrius.

Tony nodded. 'It's Eden and the serpent all over again. Man really wanted to evaluate everything—God, man and creation—and be correct in his knowledge of all these things. He didn't want to be evil, only someone in himself.'

'All those years of theology!' Demetrius said, as if it was incomprehensible. He looked at Francis and Tony. 'You fellows were the real theologians,' he said.

Tony smiled, and there was a bit of sadness in it. 'Think what you can do with your treasure troves of useful knowledge. With the new view it can be twenty-four carat gold.'

Rene smiled in a feminine way. 'Let me get us some coffee,' she said brightly.

Francis knew she was on the edge of great weeping, and he steadied himself. 'Get it quickly,' he said. 'We need that coffee.'

The three men had one mind. They kept thinking how proud a human heart can be, and how arrogant a human mind. Francis saw the whole thing as a horrible white cover of unbelievable self-righteousness. Tony saw it through the eyes of realism: this is how human beings are, in their gross pride. Demetrius sat still, thinking about Saul of Tarsus describing himself as the foremost of sinners, when all the time he had thought of himself as blameless before God and man.

He knew that if he kept looking at himself as he had been, and if he looked without the fact of grace, then for the rest of his life he would struggle in some terrible morass of guilt and remorse. Somewhere in his mind, in his theological memory, a phrase dredged itself out: 'Not having my own righteousness'. It startled him for its very aptness. It also released him in the last. There were now no bonds.

Rene was coming in with the coffee on the tray. Just for a second he thought it could have been Lisa. It was not really having known Lisa that had showed him he had not known God—that he had only known about Him, just as he had only known about Lisa. With a warm sense of joy he understood that he knew God. Also he knew Lisa. For that matter, he knew Francis and Rene and Tony. This was the true knowledge, the true wisdom.

As he took the coffee—along with milk and sugar—he felt it almost to be the ultimate Messianic feast.

'Coffee's good to celebrate,' he said, and they all knew what he meant.

My own righteousness



AN ESSAY ON THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF GRACE

One of the most astonishing statements of history was uttered by Paul the apostle of Christ. He said, 'Not having a righteousness of my own.' At first sight it may not appear astonishing, but when we ponder it we come to see its strange nature.

What did Paul mean by this statement? The context shows us that he means, 'I had no self-righteousness, and I have none. I do not wish to have a righteousness I have attained by my own efforts, and what is more I desire never to have one. In fact I fear ever thinking I should or could have one. I view that thought with abhorrence.'

This will probably make little sense to the larger part of humanity. It would seem that the majority of the human race never give it a thought. Some people do think about it. Of them, most would think their righteousness is reasonable enough—if not perfect—whilst others may believe they could attain to such righteousness if they tried. They do not care to try. Some would think the whole subject boring, and even irrelevant.

What we do know is that in fact the whole human race is seeking to show itself righteous, and this we will presently discuss, but because the word 'righteous' is generally connected with religions, or moral endeavour, many switch off from thinking along these lines. We must not, at this point, miss the unusual emphasis that Paul has: he is saying that *he never wishes to have a righteousness of his own*, ie. one he has attained by his own endeavours. This is an incredible statement.

There are those who would readily agree—and even confess with great emotion—that they have no righteousness of their own. Some of these are despairing people, suffering from a sense of failure and moral inferiority. Others are morbid people, unduly sensitive in conscience, and rate righteousness as an achievement too high to be attained. Yet others appear to have humility and modesty, but in fact use these things as a cover, making mileage out of their humility and using modesty as passive restraint against any kind of true endeavour.

By contrast there are many who are deeply religious, who work hard at attaining righteousness, and who again divide into a number of classes. One class sees the goal as immediately unattainable, but presses on, thinking that at some point in history they may arrive. Others believe they have a heart for righteousness, and on the whole have more or less achieved it. They point to the presence of evil in the world, and claim that it alone has prevented them arriving at perfection.

The class that takes our eye is the class of the self-righteous. Whether such righteousness is difficult or easy to attain, they are sure they have succeeded in reaching it. Nothing will make them budge from this position, except, perhaps, some tragedy that unmasks them to themselves: otherwise they persist for ever in thinking they have attained righteousness.

What is righteousness?

In practice we think of righteousness as that which is in conformity with what is right and proper. Righteousness and justice are seen as parallel. Theologically, righteousness is conformity with law, and this idea also obtains outside theology. Some would see righteousness as the state of being right with God, ie. in right *standing* and right *relationship*. The idea of righteousness can be found universally, although its precise elements may differ from culture to culture and even within a given culture, so that when we say, 'Righteousness is that which is conformity with what is right and proper', we have to agree that 'right and proper' varies in its forms and values from person to person, and culture to culture. However, the idea of conforming to the law as it is in any place is a fair description of righteousness.

Personal righteousness

The question which is significant for us is, 'What is personal righteousness?', which is another way of saying, 'Can a human being be righteous by his own endeavours?' There are many answers. So far as the law of the land, the culture, or society is concerned, many people have gone through life without ever overtly breaking a law. They may, however, have gone contrary to the 'spirit' or 'intention' of the law. Technically they are righteous, but essentially they have failed. This kind of observation would quickly lead us into the nature of law, as to whether or not law is merely pragmatic, has moral content, or, in fact, is a matter of form, and has no part in morality.

For the purposes of our essay we will think of 'personal righteousness' as 'that righteousness which a person sees as essential to true living, true being, and to right moral attain-

ment'. Such a view is generally linked with the thought that rightness of conduct links with purposefulness of human vocation, and has in mind the future development and maturity of a person (or, mankind), and that idea is itself linked with eternity or the living out of eternal life.

With such ideas the matter of salvation arises. Some assume that if a person lives justly (righteously), then he (or, she) is not in need of salvation, but if one fails then the endeavour must be to attain to righteousness in the face of which salvation will be achieved, ie. one must work by one's efforts, or in partnership with God, to achieve righteousness. With these ideas in mind, we may now read Philippians 3:3-11:

For we are the true circumcision, who worship God in spirit, and glory in Christ Jesus, and put no confidence in the flesh. Though I myself have reason for confidence in the flesh also. If any other man thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law a Pharisee, as to zeal a persecutor of the church, as to righteousness under the law blameless. But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. indeed I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them as refuse, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith; that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may share his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, that if possible I may attain the resurrection from the dead.

Paul's imagined righteousness

It is clear from this passage that Paul thought he had had a righteousness of his own. Whilst the righteousness we may have sought to achieve would not line up with Paul's, the

principle of self-achievement would be the same. Paul thought that being a true Jew equalled righteousness, ie. being circumcised at the right time, being a member of a Jewish tribe, living the highly moral life of the Pharisee and being blameless in terms of the law—these all constituted righteousness. Indeed such righteousness motivated him to persecute the Christians. It is this righteousness that Paul came to consider repugnant. He rejected it.

Prior to rejecting this righteousness, Paul saw it as that which justified himself. His whole life had been an exercise of doing the right thing so as not to offend God or His law, thus obtaining a humanly achieved righteousness. The dangers which lay in this he had not seen, or even imagined. Human pride is at its worst when it is religious. Whilst Paul and others believed the teaching of righteousness by works of the law was taught in their Hebrew Scriptures, the facts were that it wasn't. Paul later came to show by these very Scriptures that 'by the works of the law shall no man be justified*.

* Paul had certainly thought the law was the means of justification. It he did disobey the law, ie. if he obeyed it, then he would be just before the law, and before God. This had been '[his] own righteousness'. His encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus altered his view of this righteousness. He now became 'the chief of sinners' (1 Tim. 1: 15) in his own eyes, and had to insist that 'all have sinned' In Galatians 2:15-16 he says, 'We ourselves, who are Jews by birth and not Gentiles sinners, yet who know that a man is not justified by works of the law, but through faith in Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Christ Jesus, in order to be justified by faith in Christ, and not by works of the law, because by works of the law shall no one be justified.' He agrees that in being justified in Christ it becomes apparent that we are sinners—we, who are the ones trying to keep the law!

Paul is of course quoting from Psalm 143:2: 'Enter not into judgement with thy servant; for no man living is righteous [justified] before thee.' the same thought found in the following: Job 4:17; 9:2; 14:3; 22:4; 25:4; Psalm 130:3; Ecclesiastes 7:20. At the same time Paul uses three methods of showing justification cannot come by the law: (i) he shows that the law actually incites sin, ie. 'increases the trespass' (Rom. 4:15; 7:7-11; cf. 5:13), (ii) that justification cannot be earned, but is a gift from God. ie. grace that gives to faith (Rom. 4:1-16), and (iii) that to attempt perfect obedience to the law and fail—which all do—is to bring the curse of the law upon oneself (Gal. 3:10).

This was the teaching of the OT, ie. that law cannot justify a man. Admittedly Paul quoted Leviticus 18:5: 'He who does them [the deeds of the law] shall live by them' (Gal. 3:12), but then who can do them? One slip and a person is in the curse! When a man is in

The true righteousness: that which comes by faith

The righteousness Paul discovered was that of Christ. It resided in Christ, indeed was his very self, but it was also a righteousness which Christ gave to his followers. Paul called it 'the righteousness from God which depends on faith'. In his first recorded sermon (Acts 13:26-41), Paul said, 'Let it be known to you, therefore, brethren, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone that believes is freed [justified] from everything that you could not be freed [justified] by the law of Moses' (vv. 38-39).

In the Letter to the Romans he expounds this justification at great length. In 1:16-17 he says, 'For I am not ashamed of the gospel: it is the power of God for salvation to everyone who has faith... For in it the righteousness of God is revealed through faith for faith, as it is written, "He who through faith is righteous shall live" .' Then, in 1:18 to 3:18, he shows that all mankind is guilty of sinning, and everyone is under the power of sin. The law condemns every person, and—far from saving—brings the knowledge of sin, ie. when one is under the law the tragedy of sin becomes known. There is no escape from this bind except through what he calls 'a righteousness of God [which] has been manifested *apart from the law, although the law and the prophets bear witness to it*'.

Paul seems to be talking of two righteousnesses of God, (a) that known by the law in its righteous demands, thus

the curse, ie. the curse of the law is upon him, then conscience has become a tyrant who rules him. Fear dogs his path, and he is driven in every way possible to justify himself. He is constantly threatened by his failure, and sets about trying to prove himself, even to imitating the motions of holiness. Life becomes a misery, for death terrifies him.

revealing the righteous nature of God, and (b) another righteousness which is recognised as legitimate by the law and the prophets. What, then, is this 'righteousness'? We seem not to have heard of it, prior to Paul, but it must be there in the Old Testament, otherwise Paul could not say that the law and prophets (the sum total of the Hebrew Scriptures) had witnessed to it. We discuss this below in our footnote so as not to interrupt the flow of Paul's argument. *

This second righteousness is now described by Paul in 3:22-26:

- . . . the righteousness of God *through faith* in Jesus Christ for all *who believe... they are justified by his grace* as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God put forward as an expiation [propitiation] by his blood, to be received by faith. This was to show God's righteousness, because in his divine forbearance he had passed over former sins; it was to prove at the present time that he himself is righteous and that he justifies him *who has faith* Jesus.

The two words 'grace' and 'faith' stand out. What do

* When Paul talks about a righteousness of God which justifies, the sinner faith, then he is introducing a concept to man which is unacceptable. Here is a revolution in moral thinking. At first sight it would appear from the Scriptures sin has its penalty and that the law is ruthless in its demand for judgement and the execution of punishment, as we have noted in our footnote immediately above their can the same Scriptures actually testify to this kind of righteousness of God, ie. the one which remits the penalty due to the sinner, and accounts him righteous?

The fact is that Paul takes the cases of David and Abraham in Romans 4. and shows they were justified by faith. Abraham was an idolater (Josh. 24:2), and David a sinner (Ps. 25:7; 51). The writer of Hebrews, in chapter 11, shows that the saints were all people of faith. For example, Abel knew the fact of propitiatory sacrifice *faith* (cf. Ps. 32; Gen. 15:6). The Jewish *law* was based on the propitiatory principle (cf. Lev. 17: 11 where God Himself provides the atonement), and *the prophets* spoke of the gratuitous forgiveness of sins to come (Isa. 53; Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:24-28). Psalm 143:2 pleads, 'Enter not into judgement with thy servant', as though somewhere there can be latitude, whilst Psalm 130:3 says, 'If thou, O Lord, shouldst mark iniquities', as though there may be a case where God will not mark iniquity, ie. Psalm 32:2, 'Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity. This special righteousness of God is certainly found in the Old Testament.

they mean, and what is their order of operation? Grace precedes faith. It is the act of God whereby He achieves man's redemption through Christ's propitiatory death. There is no point in us complaining that this is difficult to understand: we *must* understand it. God takes the initiative, and does that work in Christ upon his Cross which answers the punitive demands of the law, and fulfils that righteousness which alone can satisfy God. Since He— God— 'sets him [Christ] forth', then it must be satisfactory to God.

Faith follows grace, ie. faith is born out of grace. Faith does not justify man: man is justified by grace, ie. justification is wholly of God. However, man must believe that act of grace or he will not be justified. In Romans 4:16 Paul says, 'That is why it depends *on faith*, in order that the promise may rest *on grace*.' Thus, when in Philippians 3:8-9 Paul says, '... that I may gain Christ, and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own, based on law, but that which is *through faith in Christ*, the righteousness that depends *on faith*', he means that whilst faith brings him the benefits of grace, that grace, nevertheless, must precede it, and if not then there is nothing! The act of grace is what matters. Faith is based on that grace because it is God's act and sufficient to justify (believing) man.

Righteousness is out of God, in Christ, by grace, through faith

In Philippians 3:9 Paul speaks of 'the righteousness of God that depends on faith'. 'Righteousness of God' is, technically, 'righteousness out of God', ie. He has initiated it: He has planned what it should be and He has effected it. For this reason a human being who has believed never has to look back: he is forever justified. Again in 3:9 Paul says,

‘... not having a righteousness of my own based on law, but that which is *through faith in Christ*’. Some translations have ‘the faith of Christ’, which is a subjective genitive, ie. ‘Christ has the faith’, but in fact it is objective genitive ‘in Christ’, ie. the believer has faith in Christ and not in Christ’s faith! This can be seen in Mark 11:22; Acts 3:16; Galatians 2:16; Ephesians 3: 12; 11 Thessalonians 2: 13.

We need again to stress the fact that grace is prior to faith. Romans 3:24 says, ‘They are justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus, whom God has put forward as a propitiation by his blood, to be received by faith.’ Nothing could be clearer: God works in grace in the Cross, and gives the fruit of that to man, without conditions. Again, in Romans 5:17, ‘If because of one man’s [Adam’s] trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive *the abundance grace* and *the free gift of righteousness* reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.’

We have now come to see the thrilling Gospel that Paul knew. First, man cannot justify himself, and secondly God has justified him through the atonement of the Cross. Man has only to believe in this grace, and the grace—so to speak—itself takes effect in the believer. The work of grace was effected on the Cross, and is now effected in the believer, and the agent of this is the Holy Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 8:3; 11 Cor. 3:6, 17; Titus 3:4-7).

Justification means that the believer will never come under the condemnation of judgement

Some may think that justification may be an act of God which has to be repeated, and that its efficacy depends upon the faith of the believer. Some may even believe that justification has to be followed by sanctification, without which

the justification will prove invalid, ie. that the proof of justification is sanctification. This proposition really means that one is justified by being sanctified!*

What do we mean by saying that the believer will never come under judgement? It is evident from II Corinthians 5:10 and kindred passages in the Epistles that there will be a judgement of believers. This also may be indicated in some of the Lord’s parables. It is certainly present in Revelation 20:11-15. Thus, ‘We must all stand before the judgement seat of Christ.’ When we ask, ‘What kind of judgement will believers face?’ then the answer must be, ‘A judgement for losses and rewards, but not for punishment.’

Jesus said, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my words and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgement but has passed from death unto life’ (John 5:24). Paul says, ‘There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus’ (Rom. 8: 1). Justification means acquittal from judgement (Rom. 5:18). In Revelation 20:11-19 all are judged by the records, but those whose names are written in the book of life (ie. the elect) *are not* thrown into the lake of fire. In II Corinthians 5:10 Paul is saying that ‘we must receive back the things done in the body whether good or worthless’, ie. the usefulness of our lives, or their fruitfulness, will confront us at Christ’s judgement. John warns against losing our ‘full reward’ (II John 8). Christ exhorts us to be overcomers

* Whilst no serious student of the New Testament could come to the conclusion that a person is justified by being sanctified, yet in practice this is what some do. Having been justified *by grace*, a believer should proceed to live *only by grace*. Some act as though grace is fragile, but Titus 2:11-14 shows that grace instructs; Romans 6:12-14 that it reigns, defeating sin; and Romans 5:2 talks of ‘this grace in which we stand’. Holiness of life depends wholly on grace, and not on our works. All works proceed from grace (Titus 2:11-14; Rom. 12:1; Heb. 9:14; Rev. 7:9-15), for God works within us (Phil. 1:6; 2:12-13; I Thess. 5:23-24). It must also be noted in I Corinthians 6:11, I Peter 1:2 and II Thessalonians 2:13-14 that sanctification (by God) precedes justification.

(Rev. chs. 2 and 3), and promises special rewards for those who do. Paul, in I Corinthians chapter 3, warns that those who contribute only rubbish will doubtless be saved, 'but as by fire', ie. they will escape by the skin of their teeth, and this only on the basis of grace.

We may conclude then that whilst believers will not come to eternal punishment, the richness or poverty of their lives will become apparent at the day of judgement. They will receive 'losses or rewards', but this will not relate to the execution of eternal punishment, whatever form 'losses' may take.

So then we conclude that not having such guilt over us as a burden we may cheerfully fulfil the will of God, and we should never seek to retain, sustain, or maintain our justification by any means whatever. The holiness and godliness we may exercise will come *from* justification and not be worked *for* it.

The constant temptation to establish one's righteousness

This, really, is the main point of our essay. The human spirit in its fallenness has a bias towards legalism, ie. establishing itself, and seeking to quieten its conscience by obeying the law, and, really, accruing merit of a sort. Behind this drive is human pride, and behind human pride is human inferiority. The humble have no need to be proud, for they live in a sane estimation of themselves. Spiritual or religious pride has an enormous thrust. Man wishes to accomplish all by himself, and from his own powers. He is in strong competition with his fellow man, and primarily with God.

Temptation to achieve one's own righteousness is strong when the believer feels disappointed in himself, and takes on guilt for his failure, ie. self-atonement takes over. He tries

to pay for his failure, ie. expiate it, and generally by trying to do better next time. In fact the seeds of failure lie in taking on guilt, and self-atonement is always a rejection (even if only for a time) of grace. This action compounds itself. Guilt enlarges, and the drive for self-atonement with it.

It may be said that the Christian community is dogged by the desire to atone for failure. Christians ask each other, 'How are you?' and often mean, 'Are you making it?' Replies are often couched in self-justifying terms: 'Oh, I am going very well. We are doing such-and-such'—and so on! Because of this, guilt often develops morbidly. The believer sees himself as unworthy, and even thinks God may have rejected him. Probably these feelings are rooted in a deficient view of God. Perhaps the person has always sought a parent's approval, and may not have received such. He, or she, thinks in terms of success before others, and failure causes a certain regret, the very basis for further striving to achieve.

The personal problem of righteousness

In continuing the discussion of the constant attempts to achieve righteousness, I now wish to become personal. So far in this essay I have tried to be objective, and to state the principles of righteousness I see in the New Testament, and—for that matter—in the Old Testament. It seems to me to be of paramount importance. In fact I can see nothing more important.

In my own case, having come to understand justification by grace, through faith, I experienced an incredible relief. God required nothing of me! It was unbelievable. He had justified me, and the question of my righteousness was settled forever. Nothing I could do would unsettle that imputed righteousness. I understood, of course, that the constraint of God's love now impelled me to 'live godly in

Christ Jesus' (II Tim. 3:12). I also understood that 'sanctification by faith' (Acts 26:18; 15:8-9; 1 Cor. 6:11; cf. Titus 3:4-7; Rom. 6:12-23) is really 'sanctification by grace', and that the principle 'They that hunger and thirst after righteousness shall be filled' indicated both legal righteousness (justification) and practical righteousness, so that now the conscience could be at peace.

What happened, however, was as follows. Whilst I remained calm in the assurance of justification I was at peace. When, however, any kind of failure came, and I was tempted to make up for that failure by some 'good work' or 'better action', then the old sense of guilt returned. Also I would be tempted to return to the old idea that any present sense of guilt had its roots in past sins, ie. the 'cause-and-effect' syndrome. If then I made a compensating (self-atoning) work to cover my failure, the guilt would increase. It gave me the desperate sense of being apart from God whose grace had beautifully captivated me. This then would compound my sense of guilt, my acts of sins, and so on.

The effect of this was again to try to prove myself before God, and to get the acceptance of man—whether friends or enemies. So much seemed to depend upon this acceptance. If it were possible to get praise, then that seemed highly desirable, and even necessary to bolster me up in my state of insecurity. Far from being helped, this proved to be an impossible task. Any wavering on the part of another in acceptance, any criticism—however mild it may have been—sent waves of fear, loneliness and insecurity through me.

Theologically, I realise, Satan and his powers were (and are) in the business of accusation. The old fleshly ego of man is perfectionist and proud, and will achieve its ends by its own (imagined) powers! Satan has the perfect instrument for crushing the spirit of man as he manipulates the accusation of conscience. The Christian man is more 'in the flesh' when he attempts to justify himself, than when, even,

he is in grossness of flesh. Hence Paul's continued exhortations in the Epistle to the Galatians not to seek any form of self-justification, especially when one has experienced justification by grace.

It came as a relief to me, then, to hear Paul say, 'Not having a righteousness of my own', and to realise that one never achieves a righteousness of one's own, ie. that it is an illusion that we will become godly by anything we do. Of course we are 'created in Christ Jesus for good works', but God 'has prepared [these works] beforehand that we should walk in them' (Eph. 2:9-10). Of course we should be 'a people of his own who are zealous for good deeds', but grace has wrought these (Titus 2:11-14), along with the constraint of love (II Cor. 5:14; John 14:15; I John 5:3).

What further relieved me was the implied idea of Paul that seeking a righteousness of one's own was (is) positively dangerous. As Jesus pointed out in Luke 16:15, anything we do to justify ourselves before God or man is abhorrent to Him. It is in fact 'anti-grace'. So then, I not only cannot achieve my own righteousness, but I dare not!

All of this drove me back to study afresh the truth of justification and the utterness of grace that is expressed in it. I could see—as I have indicated above—how richly the law and the prophets testify to this great grace of God. The themes of forgiveness and justification abound in the Old Testament as well as in the New. Take, for example, the passage of Micah 7: 18-19:

Who is a God like thee, pardoning iniquity
and passing over transgression
for the remnant of his inheritance?
He does not retain his anger forever
because he delights in steadfast love.
He will again have compassion upon us,
he will tread our iniquities underfoot.

This passage led Samuel Davies to write his magnificent

hymn with its powerful couplet,

Who is a pardoning God like thee,
Or who has grace so rich and free?

Perhaps no sweeter hymn has been written than John Newton's 'Amazing Grace', or simpler than Mrs Alexander's 'There is a Green Hill Far Away'. Yet even mentioning these evokes a stream of memories, hymns and prayers and statements that have burst from the saints over two thousand years of Christian history. No other leader of a religion, faith, or philosophy has even begun to draw such a response. One verse that has burned itself in my mind is,

When Satan tempts me to despair
And tells me of the guilt within;
Upward I look and see him there
Who made an end of all my sin.

Charitie Bancroft's hymn, just quoted, opens with the words,

Before the throne of God above
I have a strong, a perfect plea;
A great High Priest, whose name is Love,
Who ever lives and pleads for me.

AS I studied the Scriptures relating to true righteousness, I could see from a passage such as Romans 5:12-21 that 'the righteousness from God that depends upon faith' is a total righteousness that is imputed to us, and that our former righteousness is—to coin a word—'disimputed'. This follows from an examination of Psalm 32:1-2 (cf. Rom. 4:6-8) and II Corinthians 5:19; with Romans 5:11 and Colossians 1:19-21. I also saw from Romans 5:12-21 that Christ's own obedience, ie. his true righteousness, is imputed to believers. This is a sensational truth. Not only is the obedience he rendered on the Cross effective for us, but his obedience from his birth to his ascension is accredited to each of us.

this is thrilling.

This latter fact is illustrated by Isaiah 61:10:

I will greatly rejoice in the Lord,
my soul shall exult in my God;
for he has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness,
as a bridegroom decks himself with a garland,
as a bride adorns herself with her jewels.

It reminds us of Nicolaus von Zinzendorf's great hymn:

Jesus, thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
Midst flaming worlds, in these arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

Bold shall I stand in that great day,
For who shall my accuser be?
Fully absolved through thee I am,
From sin and fear, from guilt and shame.

A conclusion to 'My Own Righteousness'

The magnificence and plenitude of grace is seen in the fact that 'God's gifts and calling are without recall' (Rom. 11: 29). We never have to achieve a righteousness of our own, and can be content with the righteousness He has given us, righteousness which is imputed by grace, and righteousness which we practise, but which springs only from grace. No failure need ever depress us, and no so-called 'success' ought ever to elate us.

Do we realise that down through history there have been people who have groaned under their terrible burdens of sin and guilt, who have sought all forms of self-atonement, who have put themselves through excruciating forms of suffering, and who have spent endless hours in shame and pain because of their own evil? These have worked out systems of

religious worship and service which have had little joy in them, and which have answered to the accusations of conscience by redoubled efforts and compounding guilt.

It often seems that Christendom could be divided into three sections. There are those who are always working hard to convince themselves of God's acceptance, hoping that one day they will have assurance of it. Then there are those who have a light-hearted indifference to any form of law and demanded obedience: they are called antinomian, and hang very loose to any form of devotion, worship, and obedience. Perhaps the number of these is not very large, for lawless or 'dis-lawed' people also have consciences which come to the fore, making their imperious demands for atonement.

The third group is one which seeks to live under grace. They discern that grace is not an easy cover-up for their evil, nor a licence to be lawless and independent of God. These are they who should know—and many do—that 'great grace' is upon them all the time, and that the constraint of love never lessens. They have no claims to perfection, any more than they have a licence to be 'without law'. The law of God to them must be a matter of reverence. They reject the sin-guilt-expiation principle of trying to keep the conscience quiet. They know the love, joy and peace of salvation. They know the glorious grace of God. No less than others they know the battle of faith, conflict with forces of evil, but in the face of accusation they know that 'it is God [ie. the Father] who justifies', and in the face of peril that the Spirit intercedes within them, whilst the Son—at the right hand of God—intercedes for them.

These are they who have no righteousness of their own.

Out of the depths

This is the intolerable thirst,
 'This is the yearning, crying its way up
 And out of the unspeakable depths—
 The secret heart where the intimate cry
 Is scarcely known to the intelligent host,
 The intimate hearer of the depthless pain
 The secret heart knows only.

Down where the thirsting is,
 Is the bewildering dryness,
 The harsh denial of one's only reality,
 One's undisclosed identity—known
 Yet not known, sensed but not
 Articulated- Here the ceaseless warring
 Of hope and not hope, of faith and unfaith,
 The tangling tussle of love denied,
 Love demanded yet the heart unrequited,
 The spirit demanding yet unbelieving,
 Knowing the response is indispensable
 But perceiving no response.

'My flesh and my heart cry out', yes,
 But tile crying is noiseless, the deep weeping
 Is silently soundless. Only the sensitive sight
 Glimpses the wordless warring, sees the struggle

And penetrates to the persisting pain.
 Along the waves of cataclysmic convolutions
 The empathic spirit rides, shoulders its way
 To the shuddering vortex, the convulsion
 That is the centre of the secret heart
 Where the basic humanity struggles for its being.

Who then can know this deep conflict,
 This stifled articulation of the eternal thirst,
 This essential yearning of the unfulfilled centre,
 This humanity as it is—self-denied
 But seeking for its self? Man's a creature
 Yet open-ended finds no completion in himself.
 Seeking he must seek but what he needs
 Must ever be beyond himself:
 All heaven's for earth, all earth is needy,
 The celestial is forever indispensable
 To the truly terrestrial.

Once—in the centre of the enigma
 And poised at the core of time—
 The bloody body hung: its life flowed out,
 Spattered on grim Golgotha's stones.
 The darkness swirled its covering cloak
 About the great mystery; seeking to clothe
 The nakedness of him, taut, twisted flesh and bones
 Hung crookedly, awry and dislocate,
 Arms strained to extremities but embracing
 The pathetic race, the rebel suppliants
 Who vent their venom and cry their need
 In the passionate perversion
 Of unjustified hate. The anger swelled
 As the doomed mob battered its fists
 Against the unspeaking heavens, the dumb Deity.
 The fretful tremors of the unceasing anger

Clamoured against the authentic wrath,
 Denying its undeniable justification.
 Asserting self-righteous probity
 And dooming their God unto death—
 Dark death of God.

Down in the impenetrable depths
 Of the secret heart, the hidden man,
 The basic inner being, the thirst persists.
 Man in his hunger must feed upon the flesh,
 The given life of the Logos, the rational word
 That informs not only mind, but feeds the heart
 And slakes the intolerable thirst
 Else will man shatter and disintegrate,
 Grow senseless from the self-denied sources
 Of his full being. Only the true humanity cries,
 'All my springs are in You.'
 Only in the true humanity flows
 Life from the fountain of life.

Consider then his revelatory cry,
 'I thirst!' Consider the soul poured out
 To the last extremity—to death, death's dust,
 Contemplate the utter dryness: dehydrate
 He consumed the barrenness of man.
 Wet with his own tears he stared dry-eyed,
 Consuming forever the incredible wastage
 Of the denied spirit. Pain's flow
 Brings life's new life to life from lifelessness.
 Floods on the dry ground are the outpouring
 From the ultimate love. Yet thirst is hell to him
 And heaven to us. One drop's enough
 To slake the unbearable thirsting.
 One drop of God Falls to our lips uncracked by love
 But cracked for him in racking thirst.

'My flesh and my heart cry out for Him!'
 Then flesh and heart be still.
 Behold from your watching post the tide
 'That flows unmeasured from that holy hill.
 Man's drought has broken in the new flood,
 The stemless tide of a new creating, love's stream
 Waters the new emergence, the sated humanity.
 Be still and sense within the fountain springs
 Fed from the rivers and the streams of God;
 Know now their rise to love. Sense too
 The unfailing fulfilment of that deathless
 Cross Where death's dry death has taken place
 And man's alive again.

Breakthrough in love



She could have been excused a little pride. Certainly she was pleased as she looked over the large number who had attended. Some weeks it was better, some weeks not as good. However, there was a good attendance. That was what counted.

She, for her part, was a competent woman. She would not have put it that way, but she was content with the service she could do. The women, too, were helped. She knew that. They came first of all for the tea and light meal before the meeting, and they chatted. Many were business women, some married, some single. They shared their joys, as also their problems. This was the main idea. They called this 'fellowship', and of course it was. The levels or depths varied, from person to person, situation to situation.

Sometimes she felt impatient. Why, she could not rightly analyse. Often the speaker's words passed over her. It wasn't that the words were not true. In fact that was part of the problem: they were true. At least in her understanding. But then her understanding was what you might call 'safe'. It concurred with the accepted ideas of her group. For that matter, why shouldn't it? Centuries of acceptance, with centuries of testing, had proved them to be true. For her, they

were true.

She introduced the speaker. He was a softly spoken man, with something of intensity in his voice. He was reading some words, and yet it was not mere reading. She could sense that, even in her habitual passivity. So she listened.

‘Out of the depths have I cried unto thee, O God.’ The words were the opening words of the one-hundred-and-thirtieth Psalm. The speaker read on: ‘Lord, hear my voice! Let thy ear be attentive to the voice of my supplications.’

How many times she had heard the Psalm. Well, it was another Psalm. There were many of them, all good. They were the experiences men had had thousands of years before.

‘If thou, Lord, shouldst mark iniquities, Lord, who shall stand?’

She had heard those words many times before. Her eyes roved over the class, her class. Speakers had certainly made their mark on many of these women. She began quietly to add up the experiences she had witnessed. There was a woman who had been desperate and bitter. Now she was changed, gentled down, enjoying a life which had become new. There was a woman who had lost her husband, and she had been hurt. Hurt, of course, at her failure; crushed by the failure of a high dream. Something had happened to take away the hurt, even to cancel the failure. This friend of hers had a new, a joyous look about her. She was fresh and eager, glad to share her faith with others.

She heard the voice of the speaker. These were his first words, as he was breaking into his message. ‘In the Prayer Book,’ he said, ‘this Psalm is headed, “De Profundis”, that is, “Out of the depths”. This, of course, was the heart-cry of the Psalmist. Who can know the depths of the human heart? Who can plumb its sorrows, its needs, and its failure? But this man cried from his heart, in his need.’

It was then she heard the weeping. She turned, looking to

the left, slightly forward of her. There was a young woman, little more than a girl, maybe about twenty years of age. She was weeping, and even sobbing, but she was suppressing the natural noise that might have come. She was weeping to herself. At least that was the impression she gave.

The speaker seemed mildly surprised. For a moment he paused, with his eye on the young woman. Had he touched a spring of sorrow, or awakened a sensitive memory? Had his words been unconsciously hard? He could not remember. Then with a faint touch of his natural humour he thought, ‘This is too soon in the message for anyone to weep; this is premature.’ Curiously, into his mind came the scene of Peter preaching to the Gentiles in the house of Cornelius, the Roman centurion.

Cornelius had gathered an audience of Gentiles who were anxious to hear the Gospel. Supernatural signs and acts had produced a climate of expectation. In fact there was a warm eagerness to hear the apostle Peter as he entered this Gentile home. Peter had had the same surprising experience: unexpected premature response. ‘As I began to speak,’ he had later recounted, ‘the Holy Spirit fell on them.’

The speaker looked around. Only this one woman was weeping. The others were listening. After all, he had only begun his address. He nodded to himself and plunged into the heart of his message. But he was heartened. There was a sense of reality about this weeping, and the substance of his thoughts: ‘De Profundis, out of the depths have I cried...’

He spoke about another cry, out of the depths. The cry of Gethsemane, the only recorded time when Jesus used the intimate Aramaic word for ‘father’—‘Abba!’ With it his strong plea, ‘If it be thy will, let this cup pass from me.’ It was perhaps here that the speaker was not orthodox. He did not believe Jesus was seeking to evade death, but only death as it was pressing him down there, in the garden. For this he cited, ‘In the days of his flesh, Jesus offered up prayers and

supplications with loud cries and tears, to him who was able to save him from death, and he was heard for his godly fear.’

‘Jesus,’ said the speaker, ‘had always been prepared for the Cross, and it is not possible that he would have sought to escape it, no matter how horrible it appeared to him. He had said, so many times, that he was to go to the Cross. However, he told his disciples clearly, as he entered the garden, that “my soul is exceeding sorrowful, *even unto death*”. I believe his prayer was answered, for we are told that an angel came and ministered to him. Surely this was the answer to his prayer, and he was enabled to go on to Calvary, which he had always purposed to do.

‘Calvary! This was where the even deeper cry had come: “My God! My God! Why hast thou forsaken me?” No cry had ever mystified man more than that cry. Nor had any cry ever gripped any man, such as that one. It was truly, “De Profundis—out of the depths”. Who could plumb those depths? Paul had later described that experience in powerful terms: “He descended to the lower parts of the earth.” He meant, “So low that he went below even the vilest depths of all man’s evil. There was no pollution he did not penetrate, no sickening sin or lust of man which he did not capture into himself in those hours of suffering.” ‘

The young woman was still weeping. That she was hearing the speaker was evident, for sometimes there would be a temporary quietness, a hiatus in the sobbing. Then it would renew. Yet all the while it was gentle, without the faintest touch or suggestion of hysteria. The class leader found it strange, different from what she had experienced.

Then the message was ended. The hymn was in the same stream as the message:

Alas! And did my Saviour bleed,
And did my Sovereign die?
Would he devote his sacred head
For such a worm as I?

The women sang on. The final verse had its own message:

But drops of grief can ne’er repay
The debt of love I owe;
Here Lord, I give myself away;
‘Tis all that I can do.

She knew she should have felt emotion, but she had not. She had remained at a regular level of hearing, thinking. She had agreed with the speaker. His interpretation of Gethsemane’s cry she had found interesting. She must go into it more deeply. She began thinking of a commentary on Hebrews. She had a number of good commentaries.

Someone was preparing the cups of tea and coffee; another was foraging for biscuits in a square tin. She heard the clink of cups being placed on saucers, and spoons with them. And she was strangely troubled. At the back of her mind she was searching, groping for something that was eluding her. Then she remembered the weeping of the girl. Of course, she must help her. Likewise she must discover the cause for the weeping.

Other women had reached the girl before she did. They had tried to comfort her. But the girl was just shaking her head, her tears still falling. She allowed their comforting to pass over her, uncomprehended. For their part they were puzzled. Perhaps it was because they were puzzled the girl could not be helped. She may have wanted someone who understood. The leader talked gently with her, probing, trying to understand, sympathise. The girl kept shaking her head, and being convulsed by her own sobs.

So they left her, uncomprehending. The leader had a thought that kept coming to her: ‘I should understand.’ What had the speaker said? ‘Out of the depths!’ Were these depths she could not comprehend? She felt wistful, with even a dull hurt. Yet for the most part she was simply puzzled.

Then the speaker moved towards the girl, hesitantly. The

class leader understood that. The man was saying to himself, 'If women cannot help, how can I?' Perhaps his man-ness was swallowed up and forgotten in his pastoral feeling and gift. He said simply, 'May I help?'

Then she looked up. The class leader saw there was no sorrow in the eyes, no pain, no furtive concealing of a terrible memory, but only eyes that were clear and shining.

'Oh,' she breathed delightedly, 'I'm not crying because I'm sad.' She smiled beautifully. 'I'm crying because I'm glad.' She seemed to gather herself up to say something—the large utterance, as it were. 'Why,' she said wonderfully, *'I never knew he loved me like that.'*

The speaker looked into the dazzling smile. He had heard such words before. He knew that here was one with the revelation of God's love. This one knew 'God is love.' For others this truth was a proposition to which the head agreed. For this one it was a full and most glorious revelation. It was the liberating revelation; liberating love. He smiled in happy sympathy.

The class leader felt the words go through her like a dull pang. Curtains in her memory parted for a brief moment, and she remembered her own initial joy, the inflooding of His love. Then the curtains closed, and it was grey again. Not darkness, but just a dull, ordinary grey.

She talked with the speaker, as they both drank tea together. 'You know,' she said thoughtfully, 'your words didn't even touch me tonight. I liked them. They were good. I have heard all these things before. But they no longer seem to touch me.' There was a slight pain in her heart as she looked him in the eyes: 'Why don't I know love like that now?' she asked.

He was very gentle. 'There are a lot like you,' he said. 'The ones who have abandoned their first love.' He saw her shock, and responded quietly. 'Some do it deliberately,' he said, 'because they wish to escape the obligation of love.'

Others,' he added softly, 'just get into the drift.'

For some time silence grew between them. She kept wondering how the drift had happened. 'I am as dry as a leaf,' she said, 'dry as an autumn leaf.'

He was still gentle, but his voice was firm. 'Calvary is still there,' he said. 'It still takes and destroys our sins, and sets us free, even from the sin of not loving. Those deeps still call unto our deeps.' He looked around at the girl who had risen and was moving towards the exit.

'I guess,' he said, 'that she made his cry her cry, and her cry his cry.'

The primal purity



Suddenly it happened. It was as though a blind had shot up, and I was looking out on a new world. It was new the sense that I had not seen it before in this powerful reality, yet many a time I had seen it in my mind's eye. I had often had a deep and inexplicable nostalgia—a home longing, so to speak. The blind in my mind had never been pulled up. At times—with a kind of terror—I would reach out to release the blind in order to look at what had always been concealed, but each time my hand would draw back. It was as though—even if I wished—I would not dare to look at what was behind the blind. Even more sickening to my heart was the knowledge that if I would I could not draw that blind. I just had to live with the nostalgia and the terrifying thought that if ever I was unblinded I would not be able to bear the confrontation new sight would impose.

In my dream I saw them, this primal pair. It was more beautiful than I had sensed in my nostalgic dreams. The sudden intake of breath was painful, but then also it was ineffably sweet, in an anguished sort of way. I had caught them at a moment of love, simple looks flashed one to the other, but it told me the whole story. It told me that there is a pure love which is natural to true humanity, and that it is

effortless and very, very wonderful.

That was the first pain, as when one who has been in darkness is brought out into the intensity of brilliant sunshine. Every sense is hit by the new sights, sounds and scents. The beauty is breathtaking. It was all this for me as terror and delight mingled inwardly as I surveyed the amazing scene. I saw the couple gambol in joy, sporting about with an abandon that was pure. In turn I was offended and delighted, struck with terror and flooded with joy. I knew why the blind had always remained fastened. The confrontation of reality is deeply disturbing—even scandalous—to the person who thinks he lives in full light, but in fact dwells in the world of half-darkness, and semi-light. When I witnessed this brilliance it was as though I had lived wholly in darkness.

My trained analytical and critical mind wanted to grasp the meaning and nature of what I was seeing. Visions are strange events in that they go to what Pascal called 'the reason of the heart' rather than to that of the mind. A dream differs from a vision in that it is symbolic in its elements, but a vision is a revelation of truth. One sees the reality and knows the truth, and the vision never fades. It always remains fresh within the viewer, for the passage of time does not alter it. The critical and cynical elements within me battled the vision, but I was quickly defeated, overcome by the simplicity of the event. Perhaps simplicity disarms us more than any other element— Even so, I knew I was not gullible. The truth was so powerful that it convinced my analytical faculty and destroyed my cynicism.

I ask, 'Where do you see such disarming simplicity, such unassuming and guileless innocence?.' and the answer is, 'Nowhere but here.' So I continued to watch, and as I did a miracle happened within me. The word 'empathy' describes it well enough, although this was empathy above empathy. Suddenly and quietly I was within the minds of the two, and

knew how and what they were thinking. For me the experience was astonishing; I was both spectator and participator. I could understand how they were thinking, and I could appraise it without my habitual criticism. It was as though I had been given the gift of monitoring truth.

Truth, to me—at that time—was both being and doing, both integrity and action. It was very pleasing, yet also somewhat offensive to some hidden part of me. It seemed to me that I had been given—if only for the time—a grace which would subdue the terror and enliven the joy. I sensed that I was being called—in this case—to be a witness to the truth, and so happily gave myself over to the task. The words in which I describe all this will not be efficient enough. The reader has to give himself to the vision or it will be nameless nonsense to him. By this I do not mean he must reject his own rational ways of thinking. Not at all; but he must use them to penetrate to the truth.

I suppose it was the sheer innocency which gripped me most. It made me thoroughly ashamed of human duplicity, human rationalisations of evil, and the mixed motives we have for doing just about everything we do. The absence of these in this scene was a beautiful thing. I sensed that in these two was a total non-existence of suspicion, guile, deceit, cynicism and fear. Instead there was pure joy and serenity, and of course total love. Now I think that—apart from such vision—no one could comprehend what I saw. What we call lack of fear, lack of heaviness, lack of anger, lack of bitterness, frustration, resentment and emptiness, has to be experienced to be known, and the humanity I have known has always had these elements—and more. You can see then how strange an experience it was for me.

Mind you, I have had the good fortune to have read of this primal event. It was that special information which helped me to understand the scene in which my vision had placed me, so I have an advantage over many who have not

read about it, or, having read, have consigned it to the realm of the ridiculous. Whatever doubts I had had were suddenly dispersed. I was eager to understand what I was seeing. I was also recognising the source of my nostalgia, my desire to pull up the blind and know all.

To come back to that couple: in my vision I knew they were by no means mindless in their serenity and joy. They had in fact been given a charge for their lives, and indeed for all posterity. They were to set the pace, to set the mindset of the humanity which would follow them, and indeed of which they were not only the progenitors, but the true pattern. Being one with all humanity—humanity was in the man's loins—their decisions for mankind would be irreversible. So the Creator gave them a commission, a mandate to be fruitful, to rule over the creation, and to care for it by means of a dynamic leadership. They were to be the very peak and apex of all creation.

Without intruding myself into this famous event, I dare to say that I understood what followed that command, because I—like you—am human. I am a part of the solidary body of humanity: the human race. I understand that what the primal pair did, they did representatively for the whole human race. In them we did what they did. As a race we applauded their action.

And now to the action!

In that place of innocency and beauty there was a brilliant creature; indeed you could call it glorious. It had a sinuous beauty, an insinuating cleverness, for its subtlety called the whole system of the Creator in question. I watched—heart pounding—as the woman listened to it. With hindsight and theological acumen I knew what it was about. As I have said, it had great powers of insinuation. The nub of the matter is that it cast doubt on God as being a good Creator. Man, it

was saying, could be gloriously free of God-domination if he were to step out in boldness, and eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Why come to that knowledge via God? One should set up as a god himself. The knowledge of good and evil would set man free to be self-ruling, self-discovering.

I know the power of that temptation. Because man reflects God, he can easily be tempted to be *as* God. What a thrilling thought! What a glorious freedom! How heady it must have been for the woman! First the understanding that God was keeping all glory for Himself, and secondly all the rich potential which lay in one's humanity. She easily surrendered to that. So did the man to her suggestion, although he knew it was terribly wrong. He knew the woman had been deceived. He for his part was not deceived. He went into it with open eyes.

The last of it I find difficult to recount. Granted the fact that in that vision I was given unusual power to identify with the incident, and to empathise with our first parents, it was yet difficult not to succumb afresh to the temptation of attaining personal godhead. Theologically I knew the foolishness of that dream, but my humanity beat fiercely against the doors that locked it off from imagined deity, and the fierce attraction of other idols. I desperately wanted what my ancient parents had wanted. Only when I saw the dreadful consequences did my passion abate. I was sobered, cold and shivering, following the high fever of human desire.

I suppose the most horrible element was the loneliness. This is not just aloneness, though it springs from it. It was the loneliness of 'no-being' and 'no-relating' and 'no-loving'. Man is drained of his true being when this happens. 'You shall surely die,' God had warned, and I knew this, now, to be *death*. Today they would call it 'existential death'. It is death experienced down in the depths, death that separate' from Creator, man, and one's own self.

The innocence had gone, to be replaced by shocking guilt, alarming dread, heavy fear. The glory of innocence was replaced by the shame of nakedness. From the purity of natural living, they had become consciously sinful. Their state was shameful, ignoble, ignominious. The shining glory had dulled down to grey disgrace. It seemed they shivered in their new nakedness. All Godhead had become a heavy threat to them. The sun hid behind dark clouds. Black gloom brooded over the once proud spirits.

Worst of all, the broken relationships. Could such ever be healed? Could a human being unguilt itself and find the sweet and pure union it had known with God and the other? Could one become free from the entrapping coils of evil? Could the once gentle heart, now so suddenly hardened in the deceit of sin, become free to worship the Creator in purity and love? All these questions were in my mind as I viewed the sullenness of man, the wounded pride of the couple, the vilification of God and the woman by the man who blamed his action on to them. It seemed to me in that hour that man's peace was shattered forever, that his freedom was nullified, and his future only one of perpetual fear.

I was human enough to weep. Had I never heard of the Cross I would have battered heaven with my hands, and descended into the black limbo of human suffering and bitterness with my spirit. I would have clenched my fists and beat them into the face of the Creator, had He been around, so deep would my hatred of Him have been.

This vision came to me in the hindsight of history. Therefore I understood to the innermost depths of my being. Man's dilemma saved me from foolish anger and outraged indignation. I had come to know the faithfulness of God, and the purpose of His creation. Had I not known this, I would have been God's primary enemy. I would have caused His death a million times in my heart. As it was, the words

to our original parents were as priceless jewels to my eyes, and sweeter than the sweetest honey to my taste:

‘I will put enmity between you [O subtle serpent!]
and the woman,
and between your seed and her seed;
he shall bruise your head.
and you shall bruise his heel.’

Truth triumphant



There—in the first time—the silence was regal
Until the creation was created—secure—
And the truth with it impregnated
Immanent and pervasive
So that all was true, nothing untrue.

Here the newly Hedged humanity was tranquil,
The conscience gently and firmly pure
And the heart-spirit of man wholly serene,
The integrity filled with careless laughter
And the entire scene the place of tranquillity.

The invasion came by the coiled serpent,
The devious object of unusual beauty,
Drawing the eyes of the innocent woman
To pleasant surprise and delighted response,
Although the subject was subtly evil.

There, in the first time, the sensuous evil
Seduced the golden mind of the truly beautiful,
The rich glowing image of the Eternal Maker,
And the unconscious innocence inflamed
With passion for Godhead.

Through one blood, one seed, one human union,
 The entire race became defiled, obsessed
 With the irresistible flush of deceit,
 The evil of autonomous drive for dignity
 Over and against the Eternal honour.

Now the simple became complex, the upright devious,
 The childlike strangely sophisticated,
 The passion for brilliance obsessive,
 And the demand for fulfilment an idol
 Which outmoded the beautiful and Eternal Father.

There in the complexity of determined untruth
 The sight of the truly functional reality was lost
 And with it evil-contingent humanity.
 Had truth's plan not been the rescue of love
 Then the entire race was lost, irretrievably.

Truth came in the form of incarnated Deity,
 The word become flesh, active loving and doing flesh
 Witnessing to the truth unseen by man—denied, suppressed
 So that man cowered in the uncompromising confrontation,
 Heading for the hills to hide in concocted irrationality.

The attempted crucifixion of truth could not succeed.
 The crucifixion itself lay at the heart of truth,
 And the Spirit's coming wholly unveiled all verity
 In the passionate revelation of the love of God
 Exposing man to the incredible transformation.

In the unveiling Pentecost the truth was poured
 On the new humanity it itself created.
 The new creation was born of the word of truth,

The reality which purified the polluted heart
 And set the mind in the full verity of God.
 Truth battles deceit in the relentless struggle
 To destroy the falsity in the tides of inundating love.
 The evil is suffocated, the false dies in lethal throes
 Because encapsulated by the eternal purity,
 Exposed to immediate destruction where outside its habitat.

It is the release of man which matters,
 It is the liberation from corruption, the whole world
 Now lies not in the evil one, but in the truth,
 In the joyous and serene recreation
 Of Him who is the truth, the Eternal, the indestructible.

Soon will the new worlds flame out afar
 In the ultimate purging where evil's leaven dies
 And the new—the irreversible verity—
 Flourishes and reigns in the heart of all creatures
 Celestial and terrestrial to the glory of the Faithful Father,
 The Author and sustainer of the eternal truth,
 That truth His very self.

Sometimes...



Sometimes I feel I could sleep forever. It is as though the mental battle makes me feel weary. My thoughts begin to decline, my memory wavers, my thought-words are slow and blurred. I cry with some self-pity and self-justification that I am too tired to think. I need renewing. Just let me close the eyes: just let me sleep.

It is not as though I am in some interrogation room, the lights above me, the merciless smile of the inquisitor fixed on me with both contempt and indifference. It is not that. I know there is the special One, the Father-One. He is looking at me, and this with love. I should be encouraged, but still I feel tired. Then I know that my tiredness is my escape. So many times I have pleaded the 'too-much!' of weariness because there is some fear, some withdrawal from, some indifference of, the close relationship.

Yet He is my Father: He is my Creator. He is my kind but holy King. Why do I fear Him? There is no need for such fear. I do not need to seek the refuge of sleep. Yet I seek it. Then in my dreams I am not asleep but awake. I am seeing with incredible astonishment and dread what I am and what—over all these years—I have been doing. At first sight it seems magnificent, bold, even infamy—but then great

infamy, infamy on the grand scale. Then the infamy seems meagre, cheap, weak, a pathetic play from a poor actor, ham-speaking, ham-doing. Nothing grand. It is an appalling conceit, a frightening attack upon the God who made me, and—in the beginning—Fathered me. I have insulted His quiet grandeur, I have diminished His vast and noble dimensions of being. I have come to Him as the prodigal who wants his wealth, the part that I think is mine. I have gladly seized the gifts—unbelievably—that He has given me. I covet them. I tell myself I will now live in the truly grand manner, which is what humans are destined to live. Being *as* Him, and yet distant from Him, independent, proudly and serenely autonomous. I am glad that I do not have to relate to Him. His heights and depths and lengths and breadths are too much for me. I hate the greatness of them. I must denude Him of them. I covet His gifts but seize them for myself. Now I shall know the same grandeur of being without being committed to it in Him or beside Him. Gladly, even gaily, yes, even savagely I abdicate my royal birth, my sonship of this King, my sonship of this Father. I am cool. I am detached. I make my way to and through the mysteries of exciting autonomy.

Every moment of the new life is passionate. It carries the heightened excitement of the illicit, the denied, the outrageous. They sought to confine me within the limits of their strangling conformity, but how may they do this to one who is of proud and noble spirit? Everything is before me. I have riches to exploit the vast variety of things which the human spirit may know. There are heights to ascend, and, heady as they are, the resources are mine. The King-One, the Father-One, has not been mean with His gifts and graces. He has given what I desired, that which I required. I am my own person: I am the trail-blazer, the new and unique explorer. All is before me.

What I did not see in those high and crazy moments was

the delusive evil of it all. I did not know I was wasting what could have made me, and made me eternal. I did not see that I played with death, or, rather, that death played with me. It plagued me at every step. When I turned the corner it was confronting me, and when I slipped back it was there before me. That was the curse and emptiness of it all. Handsome as it was, it mocked me, letting me know that my actions and my triumphs of passion and power were temporary, illusory, and only vainly-moving wind, soon to be stilled in the dreary reaches beyond the plans I created and destroyed.

It was there in the hollow place that my dreams and notions caught up with me. My resources were stripped from me: I saw and recognised them for the insubstantial shadows that they were. My riches were not merely depleted. I saw they never were my treasures. The illusion had been rich, even grand, but now it was bland, neutral, empty, then tyrannical in its mockery, frightening in its undeceit.

As the man wrote, 'I came to myself', but this *myself* I had never known before. The coming was tragic, but the knowledge was liberation. Not to pretend, not to play dreams with myself. Not to hold off the genuine glory and honour and holy dignity of the True One, but to see it at last—at first, at first first! To recognise the lofty holiness of the eternal Father, the majesty of the true King—to see it all as supernal—this was the revelation. How mysterious that a man should see himself naked, stripped of illusions, see his ghostly evil self, and know that in the depths this was never how he was made, that his true self is deeper than the illusion of his evil.

Evil is no illusion for evil destroys, but it is an illusion, a phantom that is superimposed over the created self. Thus I saw the high indignity offered to my Father-God. My head and heart and whole being swam in the dreadfulness of my sin and crime, no less than *lese majeste*. I dreaded the judgement, but even more dreaded alienation from the

Judge. I wanted my judgement to come, to be painful, lacerating, and then completed. I wanted to emerge, scourged and stripped but whole again. This I knew would have to be of high grace. Nor could I see how such judgement would not destroy me.

All this was because I did not know the High King, the Faithful Creator, the Holy Father. I did not know that in the beginning He had Fathered me, that before I was born He fashioned me, and all my tribe. I did not know that He had planned all my days. I, in my foolishness, imagined I had shaped them. Had I known the futility of my will in the face of His unchangeable will, I would have been depressed, angry, frustrated. In the headiness of my self-rule I imagined greatness that could accomplish undreamed of exploits, reach goals that creatures other than me had not attained.

Then, as I say, there was the pigsty: great dreams drivelling down to unspeakable poverty, the indignity of becoming nothing, and creatures destined for judgement. That was my impasse, my unsolvable dilemma. Some revelation unveiled the holiness of God and set me shuddering. I saw the pettiness which had been mine under the deceit of grandeur, the trifling life that I had imagined to have greatness when in fact it was piffling. Sin, I discovered, hasn't any native greatness: no greatness at all. My imagined freedom was a concealed servility to dark powers who made me dance like a doll, a puppet on a string. When the vision came I froze with terror—not simply at the loftiness of God and His burning purity—but at the dark tunnel down which I had almost disappeared.

Sometimes I now think that there had been no way out except He had suddenly given me the vision. Not that I saw bright and flashing lights, or heard the magnificence of supernatural music, the high blasts of trumpets heralding some great personage. The vision was simple, and quiet, and

portrayed in sombre colours, and voiced in quiet tones. It was that old Cross I had heard about in former times. Many waters had passed over it: it had become dulled in my memory, the thing of Good Friday rituals, a theory uttered on that day from a dry pulpit in a dusty church, accompanied by uncomprehending stares, or dull sighs. Now it was not that. In the pigsty of my own impotence, in the cluttered rooms with their bric-a-brac of stored memories, in the alcoves and attics of a wasted dwelling place—empty now of all reality—I saw the Cross. In a sudden but quiet way I saw the slumbering scene—so domestic to memory—so tired to intelligence—become suddenly potent with meaning and movement.

It was not the poignant scene relived, the cries of condemned criminals, the cruel hammering of nails into wrists and ankles, or even a crown of thorns and fierce human hostility. Beasts there were that hovered with putrescent breath and glaring malignity of gaze, but none of these moved me as did the steady patience of the maligned and misjudged. I, who had never had the sense to understand evil, and who had never seen it exposed, now saw it unmasked in all horrible and lecherous forms. The terror it struck in my heart brought dread in its most fearful forms. I am not ashamed to say I wept at the revelation of my own evil, my own haughty disregard of the Most High God, and the hopelessness of attempting even the minimal forms of self-justification. All of that was swept away in seeing the dark phalanx of evil—a carrion crew, if ever you will—as it gathered about the head and heart, the spirit and conscience of the impeccable Son.

I watched, fascinated, and with tenuous hope in my own mind, as the Holy One—the only human, ever, of a pure conscience—drew into himself the venom of the millenniums, the putrescence of the rotting souls and minds of humanity—down through their ages. I drew my breath at

the acid-sharp accusations, the stings of mindless contempt, and the charges of man's failure in the face of his Maker, but then the death of it all as it was drawn into the maw of love, the heart of holiness, and destroyed. Breathless I was as I saw the triumph of patient and resistless love. How trifling, piffling and puerile seemed the so-called greatness of evil. It dwindled down into a pinpoint and then faded from the reality it had once claimed to possess. It was not only a nothing, but a nothing-nothing. Its shame of non-being denigrated its falsity and set humanity free to become again what once it had been—and then, even more.

Sometimes I think, when a chance word, an association of events and happenings, brings the sudden flashback of the evil days, of the criminal mind, of the lawless spirit, that had the Holy One not destroyed that past in his own reliving of it on the Cross, then its venom were still powerful, and doom alone must possess the gloomy caverns of my mind. It is not so, nor need it so be, for the greatness of that suffering has covered and destroyed the vastness of my evil. Glaring crimson has become the whiteness of snow. Dark gloom has become the brilliance of pure sunshine. Grace is not partial—for that is the greatest jeer that evil can-propose—but grace is total, utterly liberating.

And then, when the unwholesome accusation comes, and demonic powers play their video-reels of horrific memory, I remember and know as present miracle that it is the Father who has done all this. My tears flow again to be sure, but not at defeat, but at the truth that he—the Son—ever lives to make intercession for me. His vindication of me is not to the Father—for He, Himself, has vindicated me—but it is in the face of evil, the unmasking of the double lie—that my sins are yet to destroy me and grace has not dissolved them in the pain and tears of his perennial Cross.

Sometimes I remember, and so—betimes—I rest back in the Father's arms. Sure I weep for sin, and sure the tears of

sorrow flow—these for my failures then and now—but there is love in the strong pressure of His arms, in the unspeakable comfort of His lap, and in the homeful warmth of eternal bosoms.

Sometimes I think... and in the thinking, I am at rest.

The healing happening



As she sat opposite to me in what is sometimes called ‘the counselling room’, I thought that she was a beautiful woman. There she sat, clenching her fists, her long nails pressing into the soft palms. ‘An angry person,’ I thought, but then I knew that all humans are angry, at least at times, if not all the time.

‘It is my husband,’ she said, and from her immediate point of view she was right. Yet her husband was not the cause of her anger; not, anyway, the initial cause. I told myself that she had always been angry. I wasn’t thinking just about her. I was thinking about the whole human race. Sometimes there are single incidents of anger, incidents when a man kills his wife, or a wife kills her husband. Sometimes communities battle out their anger communally, and at other times it is nation fighting nation. What does watching violence on the TV screen do to one? Does it increase anger by feeding it, or release it by expressing it?

So we talked about her husband because that was where she thought it was all at—to use the current idiom. The cure of souls is something like the cure of bodies. The doctor listens to the account, picks out the symptoms, and diagnoses the cause. I guess I am a bit of a G.P. I hear people

describing symptoms as though they are causes, and sometimes they see causes as symptoms. Mostly, however, they are caught up in their anger and do not always think sanely. There is nothing like anger to make one irrational.

I need not worry you with all the details. They are generally fairly similar from person to person in principle, although modes of expression and experience of them differ according to personalities. When she had finished her long description of matters, I said, 'Your husband really isn't the problem, is he?'

She looked a little surprised, pondered the question, then agreed with me.

She said, 'As far back as I can remember, I've been an angry person.'

She seemed further surprised when I said, 'Most of us are angry persons. You know it could even have happened in the womb. Esau and Jacob had conflict and struggle there. John the Baptist had other emotions in the same place.' I knew I had good Scriptural support for what I was saying. 'What makes us angry?' she asked.

I countered that by asking, 'Who angers you most, of those you know?'

Immediately she said, 'My mother. She's so dominating.' 'Does she dominate your father?' I asked. She nodded. 'Then,' I said, 'you are really angry with your father, for being so weak. You probably want a strong father.'

She agreed with that. She also saw that this anger carried on to her husband. Because of anger she could not cope with her two children. Because she could not cope with the children, her anger increased. The whole matter compounded itself.

'It compounds itself because of guilt,' I said. 'As with Cain and Abel. Cain's hatred came to a head and he lost control of himself. Anger brings guilt, and guilt, anger.'

'How do I stop it?' she asked.

'See, first of all, that any anger against a fellow human is anger against God.'

'Some people are evil and do evil. Shouldn't we be angry with evil?'

I nodded. 'If you can handle it, but most people can't, beyond a minute or two. Their so-called righteous indignation soon passes to self-righteous indignation, and that is fatal.'

She agreed with that. She was a thoughtful woman. 'So how did my anger start?' she asked.

'We have anger with God,' I said. 'It is universal. Part of our being one with Adam. We are anti-God. We exchanged the truth of God for a lie. We want to go our way, and yet God is always there. He never leaves us alone. We wish He would leave us alone to handle our own lives. That's why we hate Him—because underneath it all we know the truth, but we try to suppress it. God never lets up; He's always around.'

'Is that the whole story?' she asked. I was a bit surprised by the question.

Then I said, 'Well, there's much more to it than that. We reckon we have causes to be angry with Him. I'll spell them out if you like.'

She wanted me to spell them out, so I did. I said, 'There are four things which we say condition us. We reckon these things are responsible for the way we turn out—the kind of persons we become.'

She seemed eager to hear. At the beginning of our interview I had picked up the fact that she was excessively introspective, and she revelled in self-examination. Tiny details stuck in her memory. She would cheerfully have gone on about herself for many more hours, but we had cut that short.

'The four things,' I said, 'are heredity, parental upbringing, environment and circumstances.' She saw that at once and agreed.

‘We have no part in these four things,’ I said, ‘for we cannot control them. We have had no say in any of them. We reckon that they are a kind of fate. We have been landed with them. We then reckon that we are the victims of these things. We could do nothing about them. In one sense we have been fated to be what we now are. In that way we shed responsibility for being what we are.’

She agreed, as though that were a foregone conclusion. I shook my head. ‘No way can we excuse ourselves. We are not responsible for the action of those four things upon us, but we are responsible for our own reactions or responses. If we are negative they will affect us for the worse. If we respond to them, they will be of great value. These things will help to make us or to turn us into sour, discontented, unfulfilled and angry people.’

She seemed stunned. ‘Do you mean to say that no blame attaches to those four things, and that we are to blame for our reactions?’

‘Of course,’ I agreed.

She seemed outraged. ‘But all my life I have put down my problems to my parents; also, I guess, to something of heredity. Now you say I have to change this way of thinking.’ She looked appalled. ‘Surely,’ she persisted, ‘these things in some way affect us?’

I agreed. ‘Just as much as we let them,’ I said. ‘If we have wills then we make our own decisions, and thus are responsible for them.’

She objected hotly. ‘How can a little child know what it is doing? How can one so frail make such significant decisions?’

‘Think about your own children,’ I suggested. ‘Does the size of the child have much to do with determination? Don’t they have a kind of mind-set from birth?’

She thought for a moment, and then nodded. ‘You are right,’ she said. Then she looked horrified. ‘You mean I am

responsible for all my own thoughts, my own decisions, even though these four things keep coming upon me?’

‘Look,’ I tried to explain, ‘if you are a victim of these things—a sort of a chip on the ocean, tossed to and fro— then you are not a person but a thing. The use of choice in decisions gives us dignity. Otherwise we are not genuine persons. No, we must take what is coming to us as a result of our decisions. The actions build the kind of persons we become. If we deserve punishment, then let us face that and not blame other persons or things and God.’

She looked thoughtful. ‘Even if your parents have been imperfect? Even if your husband is a difficult person, and your children naughty?’

I nodded. ‘Our trouble comes in the building up of a can of worms,’ I said. ‘Over the years we accumulate sins, failures, mistakes, wrong acts, wrong attitudes, bad habits, lusts, angers, bitternesses—a whole dreadful can of worms.’ I looked at her steadily. ‘Your occupation seems to be searching out worms most of the time.’ I paused and looked her in the eyes. ‘You seem to take great interest in others’ worms, even above your own.’

She sat there for some time. Her head was down as she thought things through. When she raised her eyes they were wet with tears. I detected a lot of self-pity.

‘Tears won’t help,’ I said, ‘especially if you feel you have been taught badly, and that it is not your mistake that you blamed other persons and things.’

She nodded her acceptance, too full of emotion to speak. ‘Now,’ I said, ‘let us look at the Cross.’ I knew she had read my writings, and had listened to audio cassettes. I knew she had a history of godliness, of early conversion, of receiving good teaching, of church life, and godly friends. I knew she had the deadly drive of perfectionism, the lethal guilt that accused her, and the time-old device of planting that guilt elsewhere. It seemed her

husband was of the same mind, and a similar background. That was why they were not good for one another. They goaded each other with personal faults. Their dreadful outbursts of irrational accusation hurt and wounded them. The children had little chance of living in everyday serenity and joy. So the whole matter kept compounding itself. Both were alert to find occasions of guilt-laying—on the other person!

‘It all lies in the Cross,’ I said. ‘All your troubles are there. Your can of worms, and your husband’s also, are up there. So—for that matter—are the faults and failings of your parents. Of course they have failed you, as you have failed them. You have to see everything up there.’

She was stunned. ‘Everything?’ she asked. Her voice was a whisper.

‘Everything,’ I said firmly. ‘And if it isn’t, then the whole human race is in deep trouble. You have been dealing in symptoms, but God deals in causes. He diagnoses man’s problems, and He prescribes the cure. The cure is the death of Christ, along with his resurrection.’

‘How did he cure?’ she asked. Her voice was still a whisper.

‘Just by bearing our sins in his body on the Tree,’ I said. ‘Somehow he was able to do that. Maybe you can say his holy love took all our sins—out worms—into himself and he battled out the evil of them, the pain and the shame of them. His holy love must have purified them. The wrath of God on evil must have been borne by him—as the Father desired it should be. That being the case—he being made sin for us—we are now free of guilt. The death of our evil has been cancelled in his great power.’

She shook her head in wonderment. ‘I’ve heard something like this before,’ she said, ‘but I never understood it. I was always trying to do something about it, but never succeeded.’ ‘That isn’t all,’ I said. ‘You have to see that “he bore our

griefs and carried our sorrows”, and “by his wounds our wounds are healed”.’

She kept looking at me as I went on speaking. ‘Your hurts and bruises and wounds have been borne,’ I said. ‘They are finished. So is your anger, your bitterness and resentment.’ The tears were rolling down her cheeks. ‘That’s if it is the way you want it,’ I added in a firm and confronting voice.

When she was silent I added, ‘If all that is real to you, and your faith rises up to God’s incredible act of love, then you are free.’

I could see she was free. Light was glowing in her eyes, and spreading over her face. The tears were falling freely. She was saying, ‘I suddenly saw how really evil I have been, and how I have tried to justify God’s grace to me. I see now you cannot. Also I see how deep is the Father’s love to me.’

We sat there, silent, for some time, in the glow of that love. I pondered too, as I do so many times, the absolute unconditional nature of His love.

After a time I said, ‘Now you must love your parents, and him—your husband. Where forgiveness is needed, forgive.’ She nodded at that. ‘Also,’ I said, ‘you must never forget you have no past, no evil past. Don’t ever go to find some past sin or failure. Everything like that is finished. To seek something out is an insult to the Cross. It is attempting to recycle what he finished forever.’

‘Forever!’ she said wonderingly, and then nodded in agreement.

After she went, I kept thinking about the Cross. I kept wondering what humanity could do, had there been no Cross. I kept wondering, but it was only a whimsical exercise. I knew, as all people of faith must know, that without the Cross there is nothing. That is, nothing but sin, evil, impurity and judgement. Also unresolved hurts and unhealed wounds and anger and bitterness that accompany us to the grave, and even beyond the grave.

Servant song

This is my pleasure, this is my fulness,
To serve both God and man.
Serving is liberty, not servitude.
It is the release of the inner capacities,
It is the revelation of true humanness.

Serving is not servility. It is nobility
Expressing itself in the right regal way
Of true sonship of God.
There in the sorrowful scene
The servants must gather, serving with dignity,
Restoring nobility to the sin-rendered humanity.

Here, in the indignity of evil the spirit droops,
The heart is sickened with its failure,
Depressed by the restrictive and destructive
Power of evil. It chafes under the limitations
And dies as the gifts atrophy and wither.

In my dreams I have seen them—the helpless ones—
Stretching out mute hands, crying within sealed lips
For the restoration of their authentic humanity;
The essential beings once cast in the shape of God
But now demeaned, distorted, dislocated.

How do we serve? How do we undislocate, undemean?
How do we awaken the once regal spirit
From its lair of despair; how renew to pristine perfection?
But by the instrument of love, God working in us,
God healing and restoring by His Calvary balm.

Many a time my spirit has wept, wept as it has seen
The redeeming power of his healing serving, the
transforming
And then the fructifying of the old gifts,
The restoring of the full humanity—urgent into joy
And united again—exploring the reunion with the
Holy One.

Serving is not servitude, the spirit is ennobled
As it kneels to the created image of the Creator,
Spreading before it the variety, the immensity
The several gifts of the Creator, repristinated
In and by the anguish of His own serving,
The noble action of the dynamically renewing
Calvary: the starting up again to life
In the life-regenerating resurrection.

Soliloquy



The old man leaned his head against the pew. He did this gently, settling down for the session which was about to begin. He always prepared his body and mind for the sermon, or, as they would say these days, 'the address'. The hymn had finished, the people were calming themselves, and like him setting themselves up to hear what would be said.

He smiled faintly, for he had a dry sense of humour. Some even called it grim, but underneath the signs of old age he was young enough to see the humour in grim situations. He was not a man of severe spirit, but he was strong in his views: very strong. He knew some were settling down to not hearing, and it was that thought which brought the faint smile.

The preacher was unknown to him. The aged listener had never lost his interest in young preachers. He still felt that faint quickening of the pulses which told him a young Spurgeon might be up there in the pulpit and in the making. Maybe a Whitefield or a Wesley, or even a Martin Luther. He sighed at the thought and memory of these great men. So few like them today, so few!

When the young man gave out his text, the old man felt a touch of sadness. The way a man began the message

generally told him the quality and measure of the person. A man either had authority or he did not. This young man certainly thought he had authority: that was evident. But the authority lay in the gifts and talents which were his, not in that grand delegation from God which gave special stature to frail human flesh. He saw that the person in the pulpit was strong minded.

Yet he was not brash. He had chosen his text not as a foundation for great exposition, but as a launching off pad for his own thinking. The old man admitted admiration for the preacher. He was not timid, but confident. He had something strong to say, and the world had better listen! So the old man listened, but knew what was about to be said. Just a few paragraphs of speech and he could generally predict the rest.

That predictive ability worried him faintly. Few books held him these days. No sooner would he commence reading than he would know the end from the beginning. Plots were so few, and novels so many. It was the same with the T.V. Only occasionally did someone create a plot that was different and new. Script-writers seemed to follow one another slavishly. Actors seemed almost homogenised. He could predict the gestures, the inflections of tone, the way they would handle emotion. He knew most of them were trained in the same school of acting. It seemed always to be emotion, and so rarely powerful passion. Again, it was only occasionally he saw a really great actor, and thrilling acting.

Deep down he chuckled. He knew he was getting old: otherwise he would not be so critical. Few things moved him deeply, because greatness seemed to have been swallowed up in a generation which was busy about life on the surface. People seemed so occupied in food, clothing, sport, and screaming music. He knew his criticism was often unfair. Never had people played so much sport, never had so many been occupied in music, but so much of it was linked with

getting money and fame that there was little time for grandeur in it all.

But of course the young man in the pulpit was on his way, and so one must hear. He listened earnestly, fighting back the desire to close his eyes and let the words flow over him. He knew what it meant to a preacher to see a person with closed eyes. It was anathema. It even seemed impolite, as if it were rudeness both to God and the proclaimer. So he smiled gently and lifted his strong blue eyes to the earnest and angry young man.

He refused to let the preacher's theme irritate him. Irritation, he knew, was just a synonym for frustration, and frustration was a covering word for anger, ie. anger at being restricted. He fastened on the young man's enthusiasm. In this case it was a passion for justice. 'Good on you,' the old fellow said in his mind, 'good on you for caring about the world, its evil and its injustice, especially its injustice.'

Well, the young man cared: he cared about injustice. The colour began to rise in his cheeks, and with it the pitch of his voice. His eyes glowed, and in a thrice he was away. So much wealth in the West, so much poverty in the Third World countries. So little care by people, and so much to be done. He, the young preacher, was overwhelmed by the unfairness of it all. There seemed to be a suspicion of hot tears in his eyes. The aged listener felt gratified. 'People still feel strongly,' he said, and he restrained himself from the rubbing of hands together. A little imp of glee danced somewhere in his mind.

He was thinking, with an inward grin, 'Never has so much been given so often to so many in all the history of the world, as is being given today.' He knew, of course, that he was right. It was mainly a twentieth century phenomenon. Plagues, famines, earthquakes, wars and disasters had largely passed by unnoticed in other centuries. Here and there a philanthropist of note had made his contribution, but for

the most part governments of nations had done little. Occasionally it was politic for them to do so, but in these days giving was very much a run-of-the-mill matter.

So the young man did not need to be quite so angry. True, as a matter of degree, giving was by no means maximal, but it was now a fact of life. Recently the young rock-and-roll community of the world had given a hundred million dollars to the relief of the starving peoples in Africa. He greatly admired their entrepreneurial skills in raising so much money. As for himself, he had not been greatly attracted by the swaying, rocking, screaming audiences and musicians. He still believed money could be given generously without so much fuss. Still, what the young man was saying was certainly true: *we could all give more!*

It was not cynicism which made him temporarily withdraw from the hot flow of words. What was being said was predictable. The young man might not even know it, but he was voicing the thoughts of his seminary lecturer, and much of it was theoretical if not theatrical. The listener thought he could hear the mentor himself coming through the words of his student. Well, that was fair enough, even though repetitious.

The old man excused himself for slipping away into soliloquy. His heart loathed cynicism, but it loved humanity. It loved humanity no less than the irate young preacher, and maybe it loved even more. He knew that some questioned his love on the horizontal level of life. They complained that often he did not seem concerned with the needs which others had.

'Needs!' he would growl to himself. 'Needs! It is not what a man needs that matters most, but what he is, especially when life seems to deny him fulfilment of needs.' There, seated in his pew, he held the preacher in one ear whilst his mind dashed off to contemplate other things. He was not ashamed of the critical faculty within himself which scorned

unconsidered utterance, and demanded depth of thought and reasoning. He had little time for the idolatry of needs, or the thinking which assumed that persons were unduly suffering because they were denied perpetual comfort.

He wrenched himself back from his wayward thoughts and deliberately concentrated on the preacher. He not only wanted to be fair, but wanted to will the young man back to the things which had launched him into training for the ministry of word and sacraments. He knew the young man had a history and was not being fair to himself. In being fair to his mentor he had smothered his original drive for proclamation. The fire for the Gospel was being used in the service of social justice.

The old man sighed: in former days there had been social justice also. People were not lacking then who cried out for better conditions, and less cheating on the human race. He acknowledged the right of a man to act fairly in an unfair world, and to call for reasonable justice, even if he would never get it! Yet, was this the thing which mattered most? How much guilt was there in social-justice people—guilt for their own good living when others starved and suffered?

much was genuine compassion in their hearts? How much was some form of self-atonement and no true constraint for acts of genuine love?

When he sighed the second time he found himself grinning, whimsically. 'I must not turn out to be a sigher,' he thought, 'sighing over all that is humanity, and the way

goes about living.' So he gave up sighing. Instead he decided to give the preacher a break, and himself also. He would go off unashamedly into soliloquy. He had been a preacher—indeed still was one—and knew that if a preacher could not keep his audience gripped then that was his own problem. Given in some folk set themselves not to hear, most would hear even in spite of themselves. Well, he himself was old, and so felt he was entitled to a little digression from an issue

which did not seem to be central to humanity, let alone theology.

It was then the memories began to flood into him—memories of other days—and his recall was fine and sharp. He was surprised at its strength and power. He began to think of his mentors, teachers in the time of his youth, his young manhood, and even into early middle age. These instructors were of two classes, firstly those who had confronted him personally, from the pulpit or the lectern, in churches or conferences, in theological halls, and other places scattered throughout the world. The second group was those who had spoken to him through their books.

Suddenly they were with him, in this church building, unseen by others, but like some powerful host of great minds and stout hearts. He saw them, one by one. Most of them were middle-aged or older. Not a few were quite aged, silver-halted or bald, faces gentle and smooth, or seamed with wrinkles, and wise in the eyes. The strange and wonderful thing was that he could recall the times and occasions when these men had spoken to him, taught him, impregnated their wisdom into his heart and mind.

On this occasion that old Canon, or this aged Arch-deacon, or the frail but noble Bishop had preached from the Scriptures as though there, and there alone, was the true word of God. But then—in a sense—the Word had become flesh. It had taken root in the depths of this man and that, and it caused them to tremble, to preach with power and deep conviction. There was little *apologia* in the modern sense of the term, ie. trying to show how reasonable was the Gospel.

These men knew there was little that was reasonable except to living faith, so they wasted little time trying to coax or woo or inveigle into the truth. They proclaimed from high pulpits or low lecterns the true word of the living God. Some proclaimed it with gentle compassion, firm exhortation, and

winsome love. Others proclaimed it sternly, like some rugged prophet of old, fearful of compromise, trembling for those who refused to hear, and confronting them with a decision on the matter. A few were brilliant with eloquence, but for the most part directness of speech and power of exhortation had been the order of the day.

By their ministry God was presented. The postures and stances of the men proclaimed that they were servants of the living God, and they trembled to introduce their own human opinions, to be clever and to entice the minds of their hearers. They seemed to know that the word of God would do its own work, and that they had no need to impress, cajole, threaten or coax. The word itself was a two-edged sword which would cut on one side of the blade for the salvation of the hearers, or on the other for their judgement, and this according to whether they had an ear to hear or not.

'Ah!' he said to himself, 'there were giants in the land in those days.'

Tears came to him—part of his dotage he assumed—and they flowed down inside him. They were tears of gratitude. tears of satisfaction, and tears of joy. 'Where would I have been, and where would I now be, without such men?' he asked. In the same moment he knew there were equally great women too: his mother, his special aunt, wives of preachers and teachers who had imbibed the greatness of Christ and his eternal Father, women of the Spirit who in their inimitable feminine way had brought to him the love and nobility of the Gospel.

The flow of tears increased, but in them there was no sorrow. Why had so many made their contribution to his life? Why was he—of all men—so wonderfully blessed? He knew in the moment he asked the question that it was because he too had been destined to preach greatness. He shrugged his shoulders at the thought of greatness. He doubted whether he was great, but he knew he was inhabited by greatness, the

greatness of God and His Gospel.

He too, all his life, had quivered unceasingly at the greatness of the treasure which had been given to him. In the quivering there had been astonishment, wonder, and fear—a fear that he would fail. Oh yes, and he had failed. At times he had been afraid of those who opposed him. He had seen their dislike, their abhorrence of him, their scorn, and even their disgust. What he knew, nevertheless, was that it was misplaced. He could not remember ever setting out to please man. Frightened he may have been, but he had persisted, knowing the pressures and tensions of their opposition, knowing how some of them hated him and would have destroyed him, were that possible.

In some the hatred had turned to love, the anger to gratitude, and the scorn to wonder. In spite of him perhaps, yet through his utterance, they had been ushered into the presence of the eternal God. At that moment his spirit cried, 'Yes, but I was taught by great men and women. I sat at the feet of godly mentors, and I imbibed at rivers of living water, flowing because of the passion of love, the intensity of devotion, and the insistence on integrity.'

Somehow, even through these glimpses of glory, the preaching of the young man broke through. He could see the eyes, hot with anger at injustice, condemnatory of those in the pews, staring down as though he would force them into the actions of justice. The old man deliberately withdrew into his old world, and his old companions. He let his mind rove over the great books on his own study shelves.

What great men they were! He could name them as powerful thinkers, teachers of substance, purveyors of truth in the grandest dimensions. Paul's writings had gripped him irreversibly, soaking his mind and forming his theology. John had brought him into a world of love and of deep devotion to both Father and Son, and for that matter honour and love to all men. Peter had unfolded the mystery of suffering. John

the Seer had given him the key to history, the judgements of God on the human race, and the grand finale of all history.

Time and again he had been drawn back to the prophets, and he had even envied their ruggedness, their clear proclamation, and their insistence on the inflexible will and purpose of the immutable God, One 'who was, and is, and is to come'. He realised that these had been one—these writers of the Scriptures—with the writers, teachers and preachers of two Christian millenniums. There had been the apostles and prophets of the early church, preaching and writing. Then there had been the apostolic fathers, the sub-apostolic fathers, the deep minds of the medieval period, the brilliant discoveries of the Reformation era, and those men of practical holiness and healing wisdom—the Puritans.

In line with them had come the saints of the Evangelical Revival, the powerful Wesleyan proclamation of the Gospel, and the impassioned evangelism of men such as Whitefield and his brethren. These had triggered off that same passion for redemption which had sent missionaries out in an unprecedented drive across the entire world, a movement which, even to his own day, had not been expended, nor had its passion exhausted.

Above all this the young man doggedly pursued his plea for justice. He insisted on his egalitarian gospel. He wanted justice for the oppressed, and for persecuted minorities. He called for reform in some areas, and tolerance and love in others. He spoke up for oppressed women, for the right to abortion, the freedom of homosexuals, the lifting of heavy oppression by domineering parents and police and governments. Only when these things came about would man be happy, woman be free, and young people live in joy and serenity.

Of course the old man heard him. He heard him sadly, acknowledging the problems, but not accepting the solutions. In some kind of nostalgia for the old days he turned

back to his old friends, grateful afresh for their instruction and training of his mind and heart and spirit.

He was grateful also to the good Lord for the hours and days, weeks and months and years that he had been spared from death, and given good life to preach the Gospel of grace, of redemption and holiness, and of ultimate glorification. Even so he could not stay in that past. He lived in the present—though for how long he knew not—and this angry young man in the pulpit was part of his present. He must attend to him, and not seek withdrawal from the age in which he lived, and in which he could still live and move and speak.

'I was taught,' he told himself and the preacher silently, 'to believe that man has an evil heart when he is separate from God, and human greed and selfishness, pride and ambition, all combine to bring misery into his world. God is not the purveyor of injustice, nor does He fail to see it, and act in His time and in His way, but woe to the man who stands above human evil and speaks as though he were God, and he were free of the same things that he condemns! Anger little becomes man whose own heart is so devious, and whose judgement of others is often the expression and off-loading of his own guilts. In judging we are judged, and one judges purely—only One—and He is the true Lawgiver.'

He knew the young man would not hear him, and anyway the message was all but spent. Soon the congregation would gather up itself for the final hymn, and be out into the sunshine. There they would discuss the weather, the current sport, the little things of 'eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage'. They would generally avoid the more weighty things such as human evil, divine judgements, death and the eternity beyond. For the most part modern congregations—as also many of the past—chose to speak of matters mundane and personal pleasures.

This time the old man closed his eyes without shame or

fear. He was tired. Life had been a long battle. Many of his dreams had not been comforting. So many nights he had seemed to battle with all the forces of hell alone, although he had always known God to be in the wings, His Son to be interceding and intervening against dark evil, and the Spirit to have compassion within him. He had had to battle the indifference of mankind, the ambition of his brethren, the scorn of the polished, and the ignorance of the calloused and lustful. He sensed the battle was coming to its conclusion, but a thought faintly worried him, for it was evasive, straining away from his spirit.

He caught it. He suddenly knew why the young man troubled him. In all his judgemental utterance there was no apocalyptic, no revelation of the sovereignty of God. The young man was straining, drumming up his own resources to bring the world to rights. He was—underneath it all angry at God and impatient with Him for not having acted quickly, for not using His great powers to effect freedom and love and peace in all the world.

He said to himself thoughtfully, 'He had no Cross in his preaching, no suffering of God in His Christ, no knowledge of His passion for sinful man, no sense of His participation in its woes. His demand for justice has failed to understand the holiness of God, His patient working out of redemption amidst the perversity of human wills, and the actions of supernatural evil powers. He has been simplistic, over-simplifying the issues, not patient enough to penetrate the mystery of God and the mystery of man, let alone the mystery of evil.'

The young man had finished. In fact he had announced the hymn without adverting to prayer. The old man felt the congregation rise, but he remained seated. Somehow there was no tug to sing with them. He scarcely heard the words or even the tune of this unfamiliar modern song of protest. Yet he did not feel himself to be a stranger in what—after

all—was his own world. He continued to sit, his eyes closed.

Then it came to him—that final of all understandings. Something leapt out at him through a recall of memory. Of course! Now he comprehended, and in comprehending a warm stream of love flowed through him. Of course: it was the great finale, the summing up of all things in Christ, Christ's filling up of that which had been empty, and the harmonising of every detail of history, the reconciling of all things into one integrated whole.

He saw it all in the heavens above as though he were there with the Seer—John—himself. He saw the clash of armies, of evil wheeling on the right wing and the left, seeking to encompass the people of God and to destroy them. He saw the judgements of God rain down upon the earth, upon the principalities and powers, rulers and authorities both terrestrial and celestial. He saw the anger of men and evil creatures at the judgements of God, and although the heavens sang 'Just and true are thy judgements, O God! They are true and righteous altogether', yet evil gnashed its teeth, and exploded its blasphemy and venom towards the throne of God.

His spirit rejoiced. 'O God, You are faithful and true. You bring Your plan to its right fulfilment! You justify Yourself in the face of millenniums of anger, scorn, bitterness and false accusation by men and fallen angels! You are the God of all grace, and in the end it is Your holy love which triumphs!'

He did not know how close was that end, the end which would be his beginning, forever! People passed by him in the pew and in the aisles, and he sat so peacefully, his head resting on the back of the pew. They were sure he was asleep, and they graciously refused to disturb him, but he was far from asleep.

His eyes saw what they had for so long desired to see: the King was coming! There could be no doubt about that. Above him were chariots of fire, the golden clashing of

songs and music, the triumphant sounding forth of great golden-throated trumpets, and the glory of the Father tending oil the returning Son.

His whole being tensed, and his pulses throbbed. He was standing erect, his blue eyes blazing toward the coining splendour. 'It is you, O Lord!' he cried, and the pettiness of man in his multifarious needs, and the anxieties of other human beings, and the drivelling inanities of their self-concern suddenly evaporated as a mist does before the blazing sun. 'the praises about him blasted the foolishness and frailties of inverted mankind, and all creation began to sing its voluminous praises in glory to the Eternal.

Those who passed by to shake hands at the door with the young preacher, and to voice their comments, saw an old man in utter stillness, eyes closed, head resting.

One of them thought, 'How quiet he is! How peaceful!' There was a note of wistful envy in the thought.

Inwardly he was not quiet. All the resources that had been given to him were thrusting upwards in adoration, praise and joy such as he had never known.

'O come! O come!' he cried. 'O come, Emmanuel!' The preacher had come in from the vestibule of the church, and was looking at the old man. There was something about the peace of the man there that disturbed his viewer. The preacher leaned forward. 'Wake up, grandpa!' he said, with some jocularly. 'Wake up! It's all over!'

The sidesman touched his arm. 'Don't call him "grandpa" ,' he said. 'You mustn't speak like that. Do you know who he is?'

The visiting preacher shook his head. 'No idea whatever,' he answered.

The sidesman spoke the name of the old man, spoke with loving reverence and much awe.

The young and passionate preacher, when he heard it, started. His eyes grew round. 'Him!' he said, and his awe

was suitable.

'Yes, him!' said the sidesman.

They both stood silent, staring down at that peaceful person.

'Sir,' said the preacher respectfully, 'wake up! It's all finished.'

He wondered for a moment at the substance and quality of the sermon he had just given, especially in the light of the man who had heard him. Well, it was finished too, as he had told the old man, but the man did not stir. Far from them, his whole being was filling with glory and incessant praise.

The preacher touched the old preacher, laying his hand on his wrist, but the wrist was cold, and the body was more still than ever a body is in life. Some memory stirred in the young man, some vagrant thought from Bunyan:

And when he had passed on to the other side, All the trumpets sounded for him.

Prayer at Golgotha



HERE, Father, I come after these many centuries, to the Cross of Your Son. I am not even in Palestine, not on the hill of Golgotha—also called Calvary—except in my imagination. His gouts of blood have long since vanished from the dry stones of the Hill, and doubtless the timbers have dried and perished with the centuries. Yet to me, as to all true Christendom, the Cross is alive for ever.

‘This Cross is the suffering place of Your Son. His goal was joy, though his path was pain and anguish. Regarding that anguish, we speak little of the nails in hands and feet and the crown of thorns. We speak little, even, of the lacerated back, and the body wearied even before they thumped the timber into that sunken hole. We speak of a deeper anguish, known to men as personal, moral and spiritual. Even when we use these terms we know little of what we say. So much is his effective suffering; so little our comprehension of it.

‘Here on this memorable mount, we come to do homage to Your Fatherhood and his Sonship. We come to bow before Your utter holiness, Your demands of righteousness which fit Your most holy law, and Your most holy self. We kneel where the greatest battle of all time was fought against

the realm and powers of darkness, and where the powers of heaven and earth wheeled in their flight, angels powerless to effect aid, and evil creatures seeking to pit their might against his power of humility and holy love. This is the most holy ground in and of all history.

‘Today—these millenniums later—we still hear the cries of that day. They have settled in our hearts, the words indelibly printed in our minds and on our memory. The great cries were Yours, each revealing its own particular thing or element. The cry that spoke of Your Fatherhood and Your forgiveness, and then that Paradise was again open to rebel man. There was the cry that revealed the heart of true family, but which was followed by the cry of dereliction, the most tragic and poignant cry in all history. Here mankind waited in utter silence, hearing the craving sob of utter thirst. and knowing the surety of thirst fulfilled, man reconciled unto God and pleasure in reconciliation.

‘In the later cries was triumph of complete fulfilment, the sealing of love’s work forever, and then the trustful submission, the triumphal entrance into death that was no death, but victory over death both for him and the humanity that followed in his train of grace. In those cries is the story told, the old, old story of Jesus and his love. The story of Your love, O Father, whose will it was to bruise him, make him a propitiatory sacrifice for us so that death might be abolished (with all its engendering fear), in order to bring life and immortality to light.

‘It is here I bow, in homage with others who are Your people. We do not ask Your explanations of the event. In some way You have shown us the need for such a Cross. Yet daily we need the renewed revelation, so that deeply down within us the Spirit may refresh us in Your love. How can it be that an ocean of love with dimensions greater than those we bear, may wholly inhabit us? We know not how, but yet we know the need of the vast human race to have its guilt

and shame, its fear and dread, its lawlessness and hatred all dissolved in the pure love of suffering. The human race was not created for such horror as it shows in its viciousness, its enmity, its inexpressible cruelty and selfishness, and only Your Cross can change it all. There is no other place and no other way. If this Cross fails, then all fails, for no great teacher, no great avatar—no one—has qualified to bear the weight of human evil, and none is capable of destroying the cosmic evil of fallen celestial powers. No one can recover—so to speak—the holiness of God in the great amphitheatre of the creation where countless eyes gaze upon the intense purity of the Redeemer-God. How evil had sought to besmirch the Royal holiness and foist its own invented dignity upon the creation in the forms of Dragon and Beast and False Prophet, mimicking the Divine in its conceit and insisting that the Unholy was the Truly Holy. It needed the Cross to unmask this cosmic deceit, and show it as a trifling indignity.

‘Here I bow, O Father, in dear, deep gratitude. You have assured the peace of eternity. His blood washes all impurity and stain from creation and its everness. The raucous cries of proud and vagrant evil powers—heard so strongly on the day of blood—are now silenced. The voices of evil that made man’s spirit heady with their promises and their soft seductions will now no more be heard. Their empty talk will persist until the day of judgement, until the ultimate time of the lake of lostness, but within those cries is no true power. The babble and prattle of them will no longer be heard in Your eternity. This is all because of the Cross, because the humble one fought in his true humility the blustering and threatening ones. They came with the poisoned barbs of accusation to destroy the guilty sons of earth, but it was their very guilt you chose to eliminate and erase within the deep reaches of the spirit of Your Son.

‘Now we can pray for the peace of the world. We can

pray for serenity for all men. Our prayers have power because of Calvary. Our intercession has might because of Golgotha. Our petitions are strong because the victorious blood quenches the outflowings of evil, and negates the dark, strong aims of Satanic powers. How rich and sweet and deep it is to kneel beneath the shadow of this blessed Cross. With what surety we see the rising from the tomb. With what adoration we greet the strong Son. With what joy we follow in his train, joined to him by faith and Spirit. The Cross behind us is empty, and with it also the Tomb. The great ocean of love pours from its mouth and makes its universal way across all time, redeeming and regenerating as it goes.

‘Our worship is inspired at Calvary, and fed continually from its torrent of holy love. We worship in great awe and we serve in true joy. In a way, this is our apprenticeship for eternity. There too we will see the Cross—the glorified and crucified one—and our worship shall ever deepen, though the Story may never fully be told. It is the Cross and the Tomb which will have made a kingdom of priests, kingly priests who proclaim the love and victory to the Eternal Holiness.

‘Meanwhile, with love and joy and awe I come to kneel at Your Cross, with all Your saints and all Your holy ones.

‘Praise be to You, O Father. Praise be to Your beloved Son. Praise be to the Eternal and Holy Spirit. Praise be to Your plan conceived, begun, fulfilled, and forever fixed in the irreversible Cross.’

Identification

In the dark reaches of Golgotha's anguish,
His cold and nerveless hands—
Heavy with the pain of entire human sin,
And all cosmic evil (embracing all time)
Reached out in a purposeful groping,
An attempted desire to reach,
Reach me, the lonesome, loathsome object
Of his insistent love.

In that moment I knew—in the moment of pain
And the high wild cry—I knew he had embraced me,
Become me wholly as I was in my dream,
in my ineluctable anger and hate,
With all the dark deceits of my heart.

Me he became, and he anguished
As the intolerable pollution spread
Across the pure reaches of his holy self,
Drawing there out of me
The evil that was mine alone.

In the soft silence of his tomb I lay,
One with him in the unconquerable peace,
And with him I rose
When the world dawned new,
And I was the new man.